

Acquired Ingenuity: The Conflation of  
Prudence with *Ingenio* in the Works of  
Baltasar Gracián

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### Short Abstract

Critics of the works of Baltasar Gracián tend to fall into two camps: those who view his works as optimistic and religiously orthodox, due to his belief in the moral perfectibility of man and in the possibility of salvation after death, and those who view his works as pessimistic and secular, due to his belief in the meaninglessness of existence and in the inevitability that life terminate in nothingness. The critical stance of this thesis is that Gracián's works are optimistic and religiously orthodox, and the argument of this thesis is that Gracián displays his Optimism and religious orthodoxy through his conceptualisation of the cardinal virtue of prudence as a form of *ingenio*; that is, a form of practical reason which can be honed through conscious and rational deliberation and practice, but which reaches its perfection when implemented instinctively, intuitively, and spontaneously. As such, man's skills in the remit of implementing prudence, and therefore in realising virtue, have the potential to be perfected towards the aim of earning salvation after death. This argument rests upon an intertwining of the two strands of Gracián's writing which are frequently examined separately by critics: his social and political works, often considered to concern themselves with worldly success (namely *El Héroe*, *El Político*, *El Discreto*, the *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*, and *El Criticón*), and his philosophical works, often considered to concern themselves with other-worldly matters (namely the *Arte de ingenio*, *tratado de la agudeza/Agudeza y arte de ingenio* and *El Comulgatorio*). By examining these two strands of Gracián's writing together, this thesis shows that, in Jesuit fashion, Gracián considers the worldly and the other-worldly components of his thought as complementary, and that one of the primary ways in which this is manifest is through his conflation of the cardinal virtue of prudence with *ingenio*.

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### Long Abstract

Despite the wide diffusion of the works of Baltasar Gracián throughout Europe during the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries, literary criticism of his writing only began in earnest during the twentieth century. This criticism has tended to fall into two camps: those who view Gracián's works as optimistic and religiously orthodox, due to his belief in the moral perfectibility of man and in the possibility of salvation after death, and those who view his works as pessimistic and secular, due to his belief in the meaninglessness of existence and in the inevitability that life terminate in nothingness. These dissenting critical stances have fluctuated throughout time: from approximately 1930 to 1960 critics tended to stress Gracián's Optimism and religious orthodoxy (Romera-Navarro, Coster, Blecua, Batllori, Jankélévitch, and Correa Calderón); from approximately 1960 to 1990 critics tended to stress Gracián's Pessimism and secularity (Aranguren, Kassier, Blüher, and Forcione); from approximately 1990 to 2010 optimistic/religious orthodox and pessimistic/secular interpretations were equally prevalent (Moraleja Juárez, Cantarino, Grande Yañez, and Ayala Martínez; Spadaccini and Talens, Forcione, Egginton, Castillo, Friedman, Gracia Noriega, Robbins, Egido, and Almoguera Carreres, respectively); and from approximately 2010 to 2020 critics have once again shown a tendency to interpret Gracián as predominantly optimistic and religiously orthodox (Andersen, Rabone, Fumaroli, and Robbins).

The critics included in this timeline tend to focus exclusively on Gracián's worldly, social and political works, namely *El Héroe*, *El Político*, *El Discreto*, the *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*, and *El Criticón*. However, running concurrent to this is an alternative timeline of criticism which focuses on his other-worldly, philosophical works, namely the *Arte de ingenio, tratado de la agudeza/Agudeza y arte de ingenio* and *El Comulgatorio*. From approximately 1930 to 1980 critics working specifically within this remit of Gracián's output tend to demonstrate a limited understanding of his ideas of *ingenio*, *agudeza*, and the *concepto* (Sarmiento, May, and Parker); whilst from approximately 1990 to 2010 critics demonstrate a

more nuanced understanding of these components of Gracián's thought (Blanco, Hidalgo-Serna, Woods, Fernández-Corugedo, Andreu Celma, Ayala Martínez, Andersen, and Pérez Herranz).

In response to the chasm which exists in Gracián scholarship between critics who base their conclusions on an analysis of his social and political works, and critics who focus specifically on his more philosophical works, this thesis bridges this gap by arriving at a conclusion regarding the extent of Gracián's Optimism/Pessimism and religious orthodoxy/secularity using a holistic approach towards the entirety of his literary output. Rather than dismissing the *Agudeza* as a mere tract on rhetoric and rather than disregarding *El Comulgatorio* as a disingenuous declaration of religiosity written to appease his superiors in the *Compañía de Jesús*, this thesis uses these works, particularly the *Agudeza*, in order to elucidate Gracián's social and political viewpoint. This thesis therefore addresses the burning critical debate concerning the extent of Gracián's Optimism/Pessimism and religious orthodoxy/secularity, and it does so by employing a comprehensive approach towards his primary texts which has hitherto been lacking.

With this focus on a holistic approach towards Gracián's literary output in mind, the methodology of this thesis has been to adhere closely to his primary texts, considering each in turn, largely chronologically, and illustrating arguments with specific quotations and examples. This approach succeeds in revealing the development of Gracián's thinking over the course of his literary career, combatting the critical tendency to take one text, primarily the *Oráculo*, as definitively representative of his thought, and combatting the critical tendency to generalise about Gracián's works which, whilst constant in several respects, are also marked by ambiguity, contradiction, revision, and evolution. Whilst scholarship on Gracián's works can be divided between that which focuses on his social and political works, and that which focuses on his philosophical works, even those critics who arrive closest at reconciling these two strands of Gracián's output, such as Hidalgo-Serna, Fernández-Corugedo, and Andreu Celma, fail to adhere closely to his primary texts and therefore fall into the trap of generalisation. This tendency to generalise is particularly prevalent in criticism on *El Criticón*, a notoriously long, dense, and difficult work. By considering each of Gracián's primary texts in turn, this thesis reveals the nuance contained in each, providing a more accurate picture of Gracián's thought, its fluctuations, and its development throughout his career.

The originality of this thesis lies in five areas. The first source of the originality of this thesis, as already highlighted, lies in its analysis of Gracián's social and political works alongside an analysis of his more philosophical works, and in the ultimate intertwining of these two strands of Gracián's output. The second source of the originality of this thesis, as also already pointed out, lies in its methodological approach: in granting centrality to Gracián's primary texts, and in carrying out a sustained and systematic analysis of them, in order to avoid perpetuating generalisation of his thought.

The third source of the originality of this thesis lies in the careful attention paid to Gracián's philosophical and theological context as a member of the *Compañía de Jesús*. Early critics, such as Romera-Navarro, Coster, and Correa Calderón, urged a moderate approach towards Gracián's works, bearing in mind that Christianity itself was marked by both Pessimism and Optimism (Pessimism stemming from the baseness of man and the necessity that he ceaselessly resist vice throughout his life, and Optimism stemming from the dignity of man and his potential to earn salvation after death). Whilst this moderate attitude became effaced by the proliferation of pessimistic/secular interpretations of Gracián's works throughout the course of the twentieth century, recent works by Fumaroli, published in 2019, and by Robbins, published in 2014 and 2019, have once again picked up on this critical stance. These works call attention to Gracián's membership of the *Compañía de Jesús*, highlight that this Order incorporated a dedication to both worldly and other-worldly concerns, and examine the way in which the critical indeterminacy of Gracián's works may in fact be a sign of his conformity with the ideology of his religious Order. Therefore, what appears secular, or paradoxical, in his works is fully in accordance with Christian, and Jesuit, doctrine. This thesis builds upon this recent development in scholarship on Gracián and extends the observations of Fumaroli and Robbins, which focus primarily on the *Oráculo*, by applying them to the entirety of Gracián's literary output. This is manifest, for example, in the careful attention paid throughout this thesis to the Christian paradox which stipulates that Providence coexists alongside free will, and in the careful attention paid to the Jesuit objective of reconciling a fundamental belief in and concern for other-worldly salvation with a concern for worldly affairs.

The fourth source of the originality of this thesis lies in its more nuanced interpretation of Gracián's conceptualisation of *ingenio*, primarily outlined in his

*Agudeza*. Whilst critics from approximately 1930 to 1980, such as Sarmiento, May, and Parker, viewed *ingenio* as an internal faculty, whose remit was the intellect, critics from approximately 1990 to 2010, particularly Blanco and Woods, removed *ingenio* from the sphere of the purely intellectual. As pointed out by these later critics, the *concepto*, the idea in the mind, and the *agudeza*, the objective product of this idea (in language, for example), are ontologically dependent upon each other, meaning that one cannot exist without the simultaneous existence of the other. The consequence of this is that *ingenio*, in formulating a *concepto/agudeza*, functions like a bolt of divine inspiration, manifesting itself spontaneously in both the intellectual and practical realms. Whilst early critics, such as Parker, considered the activity of *ingenio* as a rational, temporalised process, incorporating the formulation of the *concepto* in the mind which was then expressed in deliberated fashion as an *agudeza*, later critics, such as Blanco and Woods, argue that there is no temporality or logical process behind the function of *ingenio*: for the *concepto* to exist, an *agudeza* must exist too, and vice versa, and the existence of both strikes man intuitively. This thesis reconciles these two interpretive stances by highlighting the ambiguity in the title Gracián grants to his text: *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*. Whilst *ingenio* usually carries connotations of innate ingenuity, *arte* implies that man can learn to refine his faculty of *ingenio*. This thesis therefore proposes for the first time that Gracián presents the idea that *ingenio* can be refined through a process of rational practice and deliberation, and that this process can enable man to perfect his *ingenio* to such an extent that it then implements itself instinctively and intuitively.

The fifth source of the originality of this thesis lies in the originality of its central argument: that Gracián conflates the cardinal virtue of prudence with *ingenio*; that is, with a form of practical reason which can be honed through conscious and rational deliberation and practice, but which reaches its perfection when implemented instinctively, intuitively, and spontaneously. Just as *ingenio* synthesises disparate elements into a *concepto/agudeza* which allows man to see the world afresh with a sentiment of *admiratio*/aesthetic rapture, prudence synthesises three temporal planes (the past, the present, and the future), allowing man to channel the divine through the actualisation of his virtue. Prudence, like *ingenio*, can be refined through conscious deliberation and rational practice, and prudence, like *ingenio*, reaches its perfection when it implements itself instinctively and intuitively. This is novelised in *El Criticón*, in which Critilo and Andrenio refine their skills within the remit of

prudence throughout the course of their lives, finally learning to implement it unconsciously at the novel's close.

This thesis is split into six chapters. The first chapter, by way of introduction, provides a brief biography of Gracián; traces in more detail the critical dissent concerning the extent of Gracián's Optimism/Pessimism and religious orthodoxy/secularity; and outlines the critical stance, argument, structure, and methodology of the thesis to follow.

Chapter two examines the intellectual context within which Gracián lived and worked via four intellectual movements: Neo-Platonism, Scepticism, Neo-Stoicism, and Jesuit doctrine. This chapter outlines the way in which philosophy throughout time has been marked by a set of dualities which can be summed up by the duality between the human and the divine (subjectivity/objectivity, exteriority/interiority, ethical action/metaphysical contemplation, worldliness/other-worldliness, the particular/the universal, and *parecer/ser*, for example). The Neo-Platonists optimistically reconciled these dualities, proposing a worldview in which the universal could be accessed in and through the particular, making human experience a prerequisite for access to the divine. However, Scepticism, and the pessimistic belief that epistemological certainty is impossible for man, ruptured this reconciliation. Generally, Spaniards of the seventeenth century set aside the problem of epistemological uncertainty and, with an unshakeable belief in the metaphysical foundation of Christianity, instead focused their attention on the issue of moral certainty. With this mindset, Neo-Stoicism provided Spaniards of this time with a moral framework which was largely compatible with their Christian faith. Finally, this chapter considers Jesuit doctrine, particularly its Thomistic and Aristotelian conceptualisation of prudence, to show the way in which the *Compañía de Jesús* aimed to reconcile the various conflicting dualities which characterised philosophy, and theology, of the time, particularly that between worldliness and other-worldliness.

Chapter three analyses each of Gracián's treatises (*El Héroe*, *El Político*, *El Discreto*, and the *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*) in turn, showing that, at this early stage of his literary career, Gracián was grappling with the philosophical dualities set out in the previous chapter. This philosophical conflict is examined through the filter of three primary questions: does Gracián recommend a Machiavellian approach to the world, or does he stress the necessity of cultivating

Christian virtue? Does he recommend that man be God-like and detached from the world, or does he encourage engagement with one's surroundings and with others? And does Gracián view good Fortune and noble birth as a prerequisite for success, or does he believe that hard work and the implementation of prudence can improve man's fate? The treatises provide material for interpretations from both sides of these debates, meaning that they are marked by contradiction and interpretative indeterminacy. Nevertheless, several key ideas emerge throughout the treatises as central to Gracián's worldview: his 'philosophy', namely the epistemological and aesthetic functions of *ingenio*, and the growing centrality he grants to prudence and virtue throughout the course of the treatises.

Chapter four analyses Gracián's ideas of *ingenio*, the *concepto*, and *agudeza*, outlined in his *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*. Building upon the roots of Gracián's thinking in the philosophy of Francisco Suárez, particularly his idea of the *conceptus*, this chapter shows that Gracián's ideas of the *concepto* and *agudeza* are ontologically dependent upon each other, meaning that the *concepto* is not an idea in the mind which then becomes an *agudeza* upon articulation. Rather, the *concepto* and *agudeza* come into being instantaneously. This means that the *concepto/agudeza*, in its most perfect form, arises intuitively and spontaneously, and does not necessitate a rational process of deliberation in order to come into being. Nevertheless, this chapter also examines the potential that Gracián sees for man to mould his *ingenio* through practice, and thereby to refine his ability to perceive and simultaneously to articulate *conceptos/agudezas*. Finally, this chapter considers the epistemological ramifications of Gracián's conceptualisation of the *concepto/agudeza*, showing that, due to the intuitive but transient nature of the moment in which *ingenio* perceives and articulates the *concepto/agudeza*, the insight provided by it is akin to the *admiratio* produced by aesthetic experience. *Ingenio* therefore provides an awareness of, and an insight into, universality/divinity, granting it an epistemological function which is intertwined with aesthetic experience.

Chapter five carries out a sustained analysis of *El Criticón*, first commenting upon Gracián's use of narrative fiction, and then examining part one, with a focus on the necessary reconciliation between Critilo/reason and Andrenio/instinct that Gracián proposes; part two, with a focus on the idea of virtue; and part three, with a focus on the idea of prudence. Whilst in the *Agudeza*, *ingenio* functioned within the remit of ontology, aesthetics, and epistemology, this chapter shows that, in *El*

*Criticón*, Gracián extends the function of *ingenio* to include morality too. He does this by depicting prudence to function in the same way as *ingenio*, and by thereby showing that man himself, in the moment of carrying out virtuous conduct informed by prudence, becomes a *concepto/agudeza*, which entails insight into the universal/the divine. Just as the *concepto* cannot reside purely in the intellect and is necessarily intertwined with its articulation as an *agudeza*, virtue, too, cannot be theoretical and must be articulated in the world through practical action (in line with the Thomistic conceptualisation of prudence). Like *ingenio*, prudence, in its most perfect form, occurs intuitively and spontaneously but, as hinted in the *Agudeza*, it can also be refined through deliberated practice. Gracián novelises the process of perfecting one's prudence throughout *El Criticón*, by the end of which Critilo and Andrenio are finally able to implement prudence intuitively and instinctively, without a prior process of conscious and rational deliberation, representing their attainment of moral perfection.

The final chapter, by way of conclusion, offers a brief comment upon Gracián's *El Comulgatorio*, showing that his view of ontology, outlined in the *Agudeza* and in *El Criticón*, is supported by this text. Given the ontological dependence, that Gracián postulates, between the *concepto* and the *agudeza*, and subsequently between knowledge of virtue and virtue actualised by practical action, and given the aesthetic nature of the moment in which the *concepto/agudeza* and virtue are perceived/articulated, it is consistent that Gracián's attention be drawn to the Eucharist: a ceremony in which man transiently, and paradoxically, incorporates God within his earthly being. Just as the moment of the *concepto/agudeza*, and the moment of virtue, provide insight into universality in aesthetic fashion, the moment of the Eucharist actualises the corporeal presence of the divine within man. Whilst in *El Comulgatorio*, the religiosity and other-worldliness of this experience is made explicit, in his 'profane' works, Gracián describes the same experience, simply tempered by a worldliness which is in conformity with Jesuit doctrine.

Through making the original argument that Gracián conflates prudence with *ingenio*, this thesis therefore addresses the following research questions: does Gracián display an optimistic and a religiously orthodox worldview, with moral perfection and other-worldly salvation as its focus? Or does he display a pessimistic and secular worldview, with worldly success as its focus? How can Gracián's social and political works be reconciled with his more philosophical works? Does Gracián's thought

develop throughout his literary career? What is *ingenio*, and does it function consciously or intuitively? And what role does prudence play in Gracián's worldview?

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### *A Brief Biography*

Baltasar Gracián was born in 1601 in the village of Belmonte in the region of Aragón, now known as Belmonte de Gracián.<sup>1</sup> His father, Francisco Gracián de Garcés, was a town doctor who, together with Gracián's mother, Ángela Morales Torrellas, lived a comfortable but modest life. Within a few years of Gracián's birth, the family moved to the nearby, bigger town of Calatayud. Gracián had six brothers and sisters, all of whom, like Gracián himself, entered religious orders. It is likely that Gracián received his initial schooling in Calatayud, probable that he was also educated for some time in Zaragoza, and certain that he studied in Toledo while living with his uncle, his father's brother, who was a priest there. While in Toledo Gracián attended the sermons of the Jesuit Pedro Sanz, and this may have influenced his decision to join the *Compañía de Jesús*.

Gracián enrolled to commence his Jesuit training in Tarragona in 1619 at the age of eighteen, and finished this first stage in 1621. During this time he was tasked with writing several *cartas necrológicas*, letters detailing the lives and achievements of members of the Order who had recently died, providing evidence of his early literary promise, as well as of the trust granted to him by his superiors. This trust is also manifest in the fact that he was permitted to bypass two years of training, and was sent straight to Calatayud to study philosophy, and then to Zaragoza to study theology in 1623. While in Zaragoza, he also served as Secretary to the Vice-Chancellor of the university there. Between 1627 and 1635 Gracián taught grammar in Calatayud for three years; was a preacher and confessor in Valencia; was a professor of moral theology in Lérida for two years; taught philosophy at the Jesuit University of Gandía; and in 1635 finally took his vows and became a full member of the Jesuit Order.

In 1636 he moved to Huesca in Aragón where he worked as a teacher of philosophy and moral theology and a preacher. Opposite the Jesuit College where he worked was the house of a nobleman called Vincencio Juan de Lastanosa. Lastanosa

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<sup>1</sup> The information contained in the brief biography to follow has been collated and summarised from the biographies outlined in the works of Batllori, Correa Calderón 1961 and 1971, Eguía Ruiz, and Guardiola Alcóver.

was a generous patron of the arts and frequently hosted gatherings for the local intelligentsia. Lastanosa's house was a curiosity in itself, containing a host of items that the nobleman had acquired on his travels, from coins and arms, to maps and works of art. The house also boasted spectacular gardens and, of particular relevance to Gracián, an extensive library. The wonders of Lastanosa's house attracted guests from all over the country, including King Felipe IV, and it was here that Gracián forged deep friendships with figures such as Andrés de Uztarroz, Manuel de Salinas, and Juan Nogués, as well as with Lastanosa himself. The importance to him of this friendship is manifest in 2.II of *El Criticón*, in which Lastanosa and his house are depicted under the anagram 'Salastano'. In 1637, a year after arriving in Huesca, Gracián published his first work, *El Héroe*, under Lastanosa's patronage.

With the publication of this work Gracián's lifelong confrontation with the *Compañía de Jesús* began: he failed to obtain the Order's permission to publish *El Héroe*, choosing instead to publish it under the pseudonym, Lorenzo Gracián. Purportedly irked by this, the Order, recognising the work as Gracián's, removed him from the comfortable life he had found in Huesca, sending him in 1639 to serve as official confessor to the Duke of Nochera. With the Duke of Nochera Gracián travelled to Pamplona and Madrid, gaining an insight into court life which was unusual for a Jesuit priest. In Madrid, he met and befriended the playwright and Secretary to the King, Antonio Hurtado de Mendoza. In 1640 the Duke of Nochera was sent to serve as General of the Spanish army in the War of Cataluña, in which the Catalans were fighting to free themselves from the grip of Felipe IV's favourite advisor, the Count-Duke of Olivares. Gracián followed his master to the battlefields and, influenced by this insight into political leadership, published *El Político* in 1640, again without permission from the Order and again using the name Lorenzo Gracián. Due to disagreements with Olivares, the Duke of Nochera was imprisoned in Madrid in 1641, where he soon died in 1642. Gracián was loyal to the Duke and accompanied him until his death. Also in 1642 he published the *Arte de ingenio, tratado de la agudeza*, using the name Lorenzo Gracián, but this time with permission from the Order.

After the Duke's death, and while the war with Cataluña was still ongoing, Gracián was sent to Tarragona, which was besieged twice by the Catalans during his time there. In 1644 Gracián carried out a short stint in Valencia where, during one of his sermons, he famously and scandalously read out a letter from hell. The censure he

received due to this instilled in Gracián a lifelong resentment towards Valencians and this prejudice is manifest throughout his works. In 1645 Gracián was once again in Huesca, where he published his fourth work, *El Discreto*, in 1646, again using his pseudonym and without permission from the Order.

Later in 1646 Gracián was sent back to the battlefield, this time to act as chaplain to the Spanish army during the battle of Lérida. On 21 November, after the Spanish victory, Gracián wrote an account of the battle in which he basks in the Spanish glory and the role he played in it, describing the way in which the Spanish soldiers labelled him “el padre de la Vitoria”.<sup>2</sup> After the battle, Gracián resided in Huesca until 1650 where he taught, preached, and worked on his own literary projects: in 1647 he published the *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia* and also amplified his *Arte de ingenio, tratado de la agudeza* into the longer *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*.

In 1650 Gracián moved to Zaragoza. Here, in 1651 the first part of *El Criticón* was published under a new pseudonym, García de Marlones. He was appointed to the Cátedra de Escritura in Zaragoza soon after, causing outrage and jealousy amongst some members of the Order, who clearly recognised Gracián as the author of *El Criticón* and felt that he was being unfairly rewarded, despite the publication of what were considered profane works without permission from the Order. In 1653 the second part of *El Criticón* was published, under the pseudonym Lorenzo Gracián, provoking these tensions further. In 1655 the deeply religious work, *El Comulgatorio*, was published, this time with permission from the Order and, for the first time, under his own name, perhaps in an attempt to mitigate the tensions caused by the publication of parts one and two of *El Criticón*. However, the complaints against him continued to mount: his position as profane writer and occupier of the Cátedra de Escritura in Zaragoza was seen as increasingly untenable, and with the publication of the third part of *El Criticón* in 1657, Gracián was finally publicly apprehended: he was ordered to fast on bread and water, was stripped of the Cátedra, and was exiled to Graus.

After this exile, Gracián seems to have regained his standing to a certain extent, moving to Tarazona in 1658, where he worked respectably for a time, before his death in December of that year. As is Jesuit custom, it is likely that he was buried

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<sup>2</sup> For a full copy of this letter see Batllori 167.

in a common grave there. In the year of his death, the *Crítica de reflexión y censura de las censuras. Fantasía apologética y moral* appeared, written under the fictional pseudonym Sancho Terzón y Muela. The writer of this tract, most probably a disgruntled member of the Order, strongly criticises Gracián for his perceived profanity. However, it is likely that Gracián died before having the chance to read it himself.

### *Critical History*

The *Crítica de reflexión* represents the first critical reaction to Gracián's works and provides an insight into their perceived shortcomings, from a contemporary point of view. The *Crítica* takes the form of a two-hundred page pamphlet in which four university professors, representing the humanities, philosophy, jurisprudence, and theology, harshly condemn Critilo, one of the protagonists of *El Criticón*, for not teaching religious dogma or demonstrating religious worship to his protégé, Andrenio, during the latter's introduction to the world (Río Nogueras 122; Romera-Navarro 1938: 32; Coster 23, 167). This seventeenth-century critical response raised a debate which would go on to characterise criticism of Gracián's works throughout the twentieth century, and which still plays a central role today: the extent to which they can be considered to espouse a religiously orthodox position, or the extent to which they display a secular attitude towards the world. By raising this debate, the *Crítica*, by extension, also hints towards another source of critical disagreement which would go on to characterise later scholarship: the extent to which Gracián can be considered optimistic or pessimistic, the former usually supported by critics who argue that he is religiously orthodox, through his emphasis on morality and his belief in salvation after death, and the latter usually supported by critics who argue that he manifests a secular attitude, through his emphasis on worldly success and his belief in the meaninglessness of life.

Other early thinkers who engaged with Gracián's works include Christian Thomasius, who gave lectures on the *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia* at the University of Halle in 1687/8, contributing towards the diffusion of Gracián's ideas in Germany (Cantarino 13; Hidalgo-Serna 22–8; Fumaroli 151); Joseph Addison, founder of *The Spectator*, who in 1712 published two articles in his magazine entitled “Prudencia y Fortuna” and “On Gracián and the Fine Taste”, both drawing inspiration

from the *Oráculo* (Hidalgo-Serna 28–9);<sup>3</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, who wrote to his friend and editor in 1832, in reference to Gracian: “I have read all his works, and *El Criticón* is one of the books that I like most in the world: I would translate it readily if I were to find an editor” (*Schopenhauer-Briefe* 172, my translation), who translated the *Oráculo* into German under the title *Handorakel und Kunst der Weltklugheit* in 1832 (published in 1861), and who partially translated 3.IV of *El Criticón* in 1841, included in his *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*; Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, who in his seminal work, *Historia de las ideas estéticas en España*, written between 1883 and 1889, praised Gracián’s “grandísimo entendimiento” (885), whilst also criticising the *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* as “el peor de sus libros” (886); Benedetto Croce, who in 1899 published the article, “I Trattatisti Italiani del ‘Concettismo’ e Baltasar Gracián”, in which he compared Gracián’s *Agudeza* with Matteo Peregrini’s *Trattato delle Acutezza*; and Azorín, who in 1903 published the article entitled “Una conjetura: Nietzsche español”, in which he highlighted the similarities between Gracián’s thinking and the pessimistic philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>4</sup>

Menéndez Pelayo and Azorín, in particular, succeeded in reigniting an interest in Gracián’s works which resulted in a proliferation of critical attention throughout the twentieth century and beyond. The following overview will split this attention into six major phases: critics working during the early twentieth century, approximately from 1930 until 1960, who tend to stress Gracián’s religious orthodoxy and Optimism (Romera-Navarro, Coster, Blecua, Batllori, Jankélévitch, Correa Calderón); critics working in the later twentieth century, approximately from 1960 until 1990, who tend to stress Gracián’s secularity and Pessimism (Aranguren, Kassier, Blüher, Forcione); critics working specifically on the *Agudeza*, between approximately 1930 and 1980, who demonstrate a limited understanding of Gracián’s concepts of *ingenio*, *agudeza*, and the *concepto* (Sarmiento, May, Parker); critics working specifically on the *Agudeza*, between approximately 1990 and 2000, who demonstrate a more nuanced understanding of the concepts of *ingenio*, *agudeza*, and the *concepto* (Blanco, Hidalgo-Serna, Woods, Fernández-Corugedo, Andreu Celma, Ayala Martínez); critics working at the end of the twentieth century and into the

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<sup>3</sup> *The Spectator*, 293 (5 Feb 1712) and 409 (19 June 1712). These articles are contained in Moraleja Juárez 1999: 129–36.

<sup>4</sup> *El Globo* (17–8 May 1903).

twenty-first century, approximately in the 1990s and 2000s, at which point religiously orthodox/optimistic (Moraleja Juárez, Cantarino, Grande Yañéz, Ayala Martínez) and secular/pessimistic (Spadaccini and Talens, Forcione, Egginton, Castillo, Friedman, Gracia Noriega, Egido, Almoguera Carreres) interpretations of Gracián's works were equally prevalent; and critics working in the twenty-first century, approximately in the 2010s, who have shown a tendency to revert to the religiously orthodox and optimistic interpretations of critics from the early twentieth century (Andersen, Rabone, Fumaroli). Finally, this overview will use the criticism of Robbins, written over approximately twenty years, between 1998 and 2019, to exemplify the way in which the general shift, between the 1990s and the 2010s, from secular/pessimistic readings to more religiously orthodox/optimistic interpretations of Gracián's works has taken place within the output of one critic.

Critics from the early twentieth century, approximately between 1930 and 1960, often quote Coster when he stated that Gracián “no ha hablado de la religión porque supone que el catolicismo es, para su lector como para él, la base de todo, y no hay necesidad de proclamar a cada instante verdades que se tienen por incontestables ante gentes que no las ponen en duda” (1947: 163. Quoted by Romera-Navarro 1938: 28 and Blecua 1956: 26). As such, these critics take Gracián's religious orthodoxy as a given, even if it is not explicitly stated. Romera-Navarro, for example, describes him as a man of “sincera religiosidad” (1938: 18), whose religiosity and orthodoxy “aparecen incuestionables. Pura es su doctrina” (1950: 2). In line with this viewpoint, these critics also take Gracián's optimistic belief in salvation and life after death as a given, again, even if this is not explicitly stated. As Coster and Blecua state respectively: “para él, el mal no es definitivo ni irremediable: tiene su contrapartida en otra vida” (1947: 304) and “el problema está en los fines, y el fin de la vida humana no es otro que la salvación. Aunque Gracián nada diga y se haya tachado de no haber dado resolución religiosa al *Criticón*, todo el desengaño de los peregrinos no apunta a otra diana” (1956: 26). These early critics therefore take a measured approach when interpreting Gracián's works, conceding that his religious orthodoxy, whilst ever-present, is often unspoken.

This temperance is extended to the extent to which these critics view Gracián's works as optimistic or pessimistic: building upon the view of Gracián as implicitly religiously orthodox, critics of this era interpret him as fundamentally optimistic, due to his belief in the possibility of salvation, but also as residually

pessimistic, due to the necessity that man is forced to resist evil repeatedly and incessantly during his time in the earthly realm. Romera-Navarro, for example, states that Gracián “tiene el pesimismo y el optimismo del cristianismo: pesimismo en la vida, optimismo en el fin de la vida” (1938: 21); Coster states that “su pesimismo es muy relativo, porque se ve moderado por sus creencias cristianas” (1947: 304); and Correa Calderón states that Gracián displays “una extraña mezcla de pesimismo y esperanza” (1971: xxxvii), but also that he “no aborrece la vida ni se resigna en un desesperado pesimismo, sin solución. Sabe que el hombre es perfectible” (1961: 220). The Christian idea of man’s perfectibility, understood to mean his potential to earn salvation after death through his ability to demonstrate virtue via moral conduct during life, means that these critics consider any Pessimism that Gracián may display as subordinate to his fundamentally Christian Optimism. Correa Calderón articulates this optimistic interpretation of Gracián’s belief in man’s perfectibility when he writes that, for Gracián,

Las ocultas ascuas, cubiertas de muertas cenizas, restos de la hoguera que Dios puso en su espíritu, consumida por las pasiones, pueden reavivarse con un noble aliento. La perfección y la virtud son comunicables, y Gracián, que conoce por sí mismo esta aptitud perfecta del hombre, se esfuerza en inculcar ideales afanes en los demás, y así, parenéticamente, toda su obra es una suasoria, una permanente didáctica, encaminada al mejoramiento moral de las criaturas (1961: 216).

Man’s perfectibility, virtue, morality, and salvation are possible thanks to the spark of divinity that resides within him. As such, for this generation of critics, Gracián always has optimistically in mind “su finalidad trascendente, tan conforme con su condición de religioso” (Correa Calderón 1971: xxi).

A final characteristic of criticism from the early twentieth century is that, despite the spark of the divine that resides within man’s interiority, due to the necessity that man cultivate virtue in order to earn salvation, the external, earthly world is granted value by being the realm within which one’s moral status is tested and proved. In other words, morality, virtue, and salvation cannot be cultivated via introspective contemplation within one’s interiority and only come into being through interaction and engagement with the world. For this reason, Batllori states that “toda la obra de Gracián, por especulativa y racional que parezca, es más obra de un moralista, que de un metafísico puro” (1958: 42). Romera-Navarro agrees when he states that Gracián “no se dirige a hombres contemplativos que viven alejados del ruido del mundo y pueden practicar cómodamente la virtud. Se dirige a criaturas de

carne y hueso entregadas a la batalla de la existencia” (1938: 22), and Correa Calderón also stresses the way in which Gracián rejects introspection and implicates himself in the external world when he writes that,

No es Gracián, en efecto, un místico, un contemplativo, sino un evangelizador actuante. Desciende de la cátedra, del púlpito, se sale de su confesionario, deja atrás su silencioso convento, donde sus hermanos en religión practican la virtud, y vase en busca de quienes le necesitan (1961: 227).

Jankélévitch, in particular, theorises extensively upon the interplay between the interior and the exterior in Gracián’s works, concluding that *ser* and *parecer* are interdependent: *ser* represents pure divinity, but it requires the filter of *parecer* in order to be glimpsed in the earthly realm. As such, *parecer* is granted value through its incorporation of *ser*: “quelque chose de la substance resplendissante, mais obscure, est passé dans l’apparence resplendie. Le petit être du Paraître rayonne du grand être de l’Essence” (1958: 120). In other words, for critics of the early twentieth century, interiority and exteriority, interior virtue and exterior moral conduct, *ser* and *parecer*, all complement and work in harmony with each other.

However, as scholarship on Gracián’s works developed throughout the twentieth century, readings which stressed his secularity and Pessimism began to prevail, and were particularly prominent from approximately 1960 until 1990. In contrast to critics of the early twentieth century, who considered interiority and exteriority in Gracián’s works as complementary, critics from the later Twentieth Century interpreted Gracián’s stance towards the external world as one of suspicion, in which man must protect himself from the deceitfulness of the outside world and learn to manipulate those around him to his own advantage. As Aranguren states, the external world, and particularly the court, in Gracián’s works “n’est plus, par essence, comme pour Castiglione, une école d’éthique et d’esthétique; elle est le champ clos par excellence de la lutte de l’homme contre l’homme” (1963: 282). Such readings, which stress the hostility of the outside world, tend to advocate a “manipulation pratique de la réalité”, which aligns Gracián’s worldview “près du machiavélisme” (Aranguren 1963: 287 and 282, respectively). In contrast to interpretations by critics from the early twentieth century, Machiavellian interpretations of Gracián’s works argue that he is not interested in the issue of morality, and that he conceptualises man’s engagement with the outside world as “un caractère technique, purement instrumental, ni bon ni mauvais, moralement neutre” (Aranguren 1963: 287).

As can be deduced from an interpretation that considers Gracián as neutral on the issue of morality, critics from the later twentieth century tend to reject the idea that Gracián offers an optimistic and Christian version of salvation and immortality, and to stress instead his secularity and Pessimism concerning the meaninglessness of life. Kassier, for example, with particular reference to *El Criticón*, states that “in its totality, Gracián’s encyclopaedic representation of man’s existence in the mundane, temporal sphere, the ‘mundo civil’, persistently eschews any notion of a transcendent meaning or purpose to life” (1976: 48), characterises man’s life as “an intrinsically worthless succession of experiences” (133–4), and concludes that, “because of its meaningless and inherently unhappy nature, it would have been better to have been spared life completely” (49). Likewise, and again with reference to *El Criticón*, Blüher too stresses Gracián’s secularity and Pessimism when he states that,

Su blanco no es la articulación de una visión positiva de la vida, sino la desilusión, el “desengaño” del mundo. La sabiduría del *Criticón* es amarga, pesimista. Al final de su viaje por la vida, lo que Critilo y Andrenio encuentran es decepción y melancolía. Lo único que en el *Criticón* hace a la vida digna de vivirse para después de la muerte es la precaria Gloria terrenal en la memoria de las generaciones posteriores. En la sabiduría intramundana de Gracián falta la proyección hacia la trascendencia (1983: 558).

Through their detachment of Gracián’s works from the issue of morality and of individual responsibility for one’s own moral status, critics such as Kassier and Blüher necessarily negate the possibility of salvation and life after death in Gracián’s worldview. This culminates in the criticism of Forcione who, via an analysis of the figure of ‘Nemo’ and of the theme of nothingness in Gracián’s works, concludes that Gracián “no sólo pedía el rechazo de la individualidad, la disolución de todos los límites del ser y la inmovilización de la voluntad, sino hasta un rechazo de Dios en un abandono total a la nada” (1985/6: 684). Building upon the reading of Gracián as both irreligious and morally neutral, this strain of criticism, when taken to its extremes, pessimistically views nothingness in Gracián’s worldview as the inevitable end of man’s life. Whilst critics of the early twentieth century stressed Gracián’s focus on accepting individual responsibility for one’s moral status, towards the aim of earning salvation after death, critics of the late twentieth century view Gracián as neutral on the issue of morality, for the reason that no reward or punishment, only nothingness, awaits man upon death.

Whilst critical disagreement was raging between the extent to which Gracián can be interpreted as religiously orthodox or secular, optimistic or pessimistic, which

primarily drew inspiration from the treatises and *El Criticón*, another strand of criticism was also in development. This strand tended to focus on what can be termed Gracián's 'philosophy', and tended to focus its attention on the *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*. Between 1930 and 1980 critics concentrated on trying to define precisely what *agudeza*, and the associated concepts of *ingenio* and the *concepto*, were, and these definitions most often fell into the trap of limiting them to the remit of rhetoric, or to the remit of intellectual wit. Sarmiento, for example, carries out a sustained comparison between the *concepto* and the rhetorical device of simile (1932), and Parker uses the rhetorical device of metaphor to inform his English translation of the word 'concepto' (1982: xxvii), meaning that both critics view *agudeza* and the *concepto* through the filter of a pre-established and long-standing rhetorical tradition. Furthermore, the critical tendency during this period to view *agudeza* as purely intellectual is manifest when Sarmiento defines it as a "function of the mind", an "intellectual sharpness", and as an "intellectual activity" (1932: 280); when May describes it as a "purely intellectual art", and as "the work of the understanding" (1948: 275 and 1950: 16, respectively); and when Parker too defines it as the "agility of the intellect" (1982: xxii).

However, from 1990 to 2000, critics began to add nuance to this early interpretation of *agudeza*, *ingenio*, and the *concepto*, liberating their interpretations from the remit of rhetoric and building upon the intellectual conceptualisation of these ideas to include the subsequent step of practical action. As such, Gracián's ideas of *agudeza*, *ingenio*, and the *concepto* came to be intertwined with the aim of moral conduct, and not simply viewed as instruments of wit. In other words, they function within three philosophical branches: that of Truth (epistemology), that of Beauty (aesthetics) and that of Goodness (morality) (Hidalgo-Serna 1993: 11 and 61). Blanco and Woods go so far as to argue that the intellectual and the practical function of *agudeza* are simultaneous and inseparable, that Truth, Beauty, and Goodness are intertwined in Gracián's worldview, and that, as a consequence, there cannot be Truth or Beauty without Goodness, and vice versa (1992: 55–7 and 1995: 7–11, respectively). This means, for example, that man's moral status (his Goodness) cannot exist without being manifest in the world (bringing Beauty to it in aesthetic fashion). For this reason, Andreu Celma states that Gracián carries out an "estetización de la vida", offering "un arte de vivir que haga del vivir un arte" (1998: 253 and 282, respectively).

Furthermore, in line with the centrality granted to morality by these critics, one of their major contributions towards scholarship of Gracián's works is that they come to recognise *ingenio* as a conceptualisation of reason which differs from 'pure' reason, the latter usually understood as a static and unchanging sense of rationality which lies within man's interiority, detached and independent from the world. *Ingenio*, on the other hand, is a type of practical reason which functions contingently, reconfiguring itself in constant dialogue with the particularity of circumstances in the exterior world. Hidalgo-Serna, for example, identifies "el intento racionalista de identificar el ingenio con 'juicio y razón'" as the "punto de partida de la mayor parte de las interpretaciones desacertadas del filósofo español [Gracián]" (1993: 45), and Ayala Martínez highlights the necessary differentiation that must be made between what has hitherto been referred to as 'reason' and Gracián's concept of *ingenio* when he specifies, "ingenio, mejor, la razón ingeniosa" (2004a: 131). A product of this interpretation, which stresses the contingent, practical, and moral function of *ingenio*, is that Gracián is viewed as optimistically engaged with the world, and not as suspicious of or as hostile towards it. As Andreu Celma states, "conocer ingeniosamente es sumergirse en el entramado activo de la realidad interconexa" (1998: 184), and as Hidalgo-Serna points out,

Una y otra vez se ha venido exagerando el talante pesimista de nuestro Siglo de Oro. Sin embargo, los libros de Gracián muestran un evidente y esperanzador optimismo, siempre y cuando no se cierren los ojos ante la ingeniosa creatividad de su imagen del hombre (1993: 46).

As such, these later critics, engaging specifically with the *Agudeza*, succeed in seeing Optimism in Gracián's works, in the wake of criticism from the late twentieth century period, from 1960 to 1990, which asserted his pessimistic outlook on life.

Possibly as a result of this reappraisal of the *Agudeza* general criticism on Gracián's works from the 1990s and 2000s also begins to temper the secular and pessimistic readings of the 1960 to 1990 period with interpretations which, once again, view Gracián as religiously orthodox and optimistic, and at this point the two interpretative stances are equally prevalent. For example, critics such as Spadaccini and Talens continue to interpret Gracián as Machiavellian, describing his works as encouraging "hiding one's true self", so that man can "manipulate appearances in order to meet expectations" (1997: xi and xxi, respectively); Egginton maintains that man's success in the world "depends entirely on the depth of your façade", and

describes Gracián's work as "a secular ethics for those desiring success in this world, [unconcerned] with other worldly matters" (1997: 155 and 161, respectively); and Gracia Noriega again draws similarities between Gracián's worldview and that of Machiavelli, describing the world of Gracián's works as "un mundo en lucha" (2001: 125–7). The secularity and Pessimism of these interpretations is evident when these critics stress the purposelessness and meaninglessness of man's life. Forcione, for example, writes that "politics has displaced metaphysics" in Gracián's works, leading to a "cosmic disconnection" between man and God (1997: 7 and 30, 35, respectively); Egginton describes how the "basic unity of physical and metaphysical certainties characterising the anthropocentrism of the Renaissance began to dissolve", leaving man with "epistemological traumas" (1997: 152); Friedman states that Gracián demonstrates in his works the "loss of comforting order and security" (1997: 371); and Almuquera Carreres describes the "instability of the world" in Gracián's works, resulting from "a desolate man losing his place in the order of nature" (2004: 224–5). The product of these secular readings, which detach Gracián's works from the metaphysical basis of Christianity, is that the possibility of a Christian afterlife is negated, replaced by worldly fame as the "único remedio contra la muerte" (Egido 2000: 113; repeated in 2001: 178, 2014: 34, and by Castillo 1997: 193).

Nevertheless, coexisting with these secular and pessimistic interpretations of Gracián's works during the 1990s and 2000s is a revival of criticism which asserts his religious orthodoxy and Optimism. Cantarino, for example, appears to draw upon the optimistic interpretations of critics working specifically on the *Agudeza* when she writes that,

La mayor parte de las interpretaciones y de las valoraciones de Gracián como "moralista" han incidido en el carácter racionalista de su pensamiento como elemento básico, contribuyendo así a ocultar los aspectos más originales, acordes con la nueva configuración de la ciencia político-moral, como son el papel de la experiencia y la invención del ingenio en el proceso de conocimiento inductivo y en la constitución de máximas y reglas prácticas capaces de atenderse a las necesidades y circunstancias de cada momento (2001: 13).

Whilst conceding that Gracián's works direct themselves towards the sphere of political life, often considered to necessitate cold, rational, self-interested Machiavellianism, Cantarino draws upon Gracián's concept of *ingenio* to argue for the importance of experience, invention, inductive reasoning, and circumstantial particularity when it comes to taking action. Cantarino interprets Gracián's works not as primarily focused on attaining worldly, political success, but as aimed towards the

moral success which can result from virtuous action undertaken in the social sphere. Gracián's interest in political, social life therefore betrays an underlying dedication to the Christian ideas of morality and salvation, articulated by Moraleja Juárez when he writes that,

Ciertamente, el mundo barroco acepta aquella sensualidad renacentista que promoverá un impulso de sentido horizontal hacia todo lo terreno, y sobre todo, hacia lo humano. No obstante, un impulso de sentido vertical, enormemente avivado sobre todo por la espiritualidad contrarreformista, complementa y subordina al anterior (1999: 105–6).

For critics of this era, Gracián may write about the political sphere, but his interest in this sphere is always connected to the extent to which man can carry out moral conduct within it, and can therefore earn salvation after death. The interpretation of Gracián as dedicated equally to politics and morality, for the way in which participation in the former can cultivate the status of the latter, is highlighted by Moraleja Juárez, when he argues that Gracián reacts against the moral neutrality of Machiavelli by offering his readers “una forma política preñada de contenidos ético-religiosos” (Moraleja Juárez 1999: 12, 48). These critics therefore see religious orthodoxy and an optimistic belief in man's perfectibility in Gracián's works, pointed out by Ayala Martínez when he writes that “Gracián escribió sus obras con una clara intención moral. Cree en el valor de la perfección como meta del hombre, al que considera un ser perfectible en el orden intelectual y moral” (2004b: 136).

Whilst during the 1990s and 2000s interpretations of Gracián's works which view them as either religiously orthodox and optimistic, or secular and pessimistic were equally prevalent, during the 2010s the religiously orthodox and optimistic readings emerge as dominant once again. Like the critics of the early twentieth century, between approximately 1930 and 1960, critics from the 2010s tend to take Gracián's religious orthodoxy as a given, even if it is not explicitly stated. Rabone, for example, asserts that “while explicitly Christian references may be rare, the *Criticón* is not simply a secular work, as the allegory is adapted to fit a Christian position, even if that compatibility is usually left implicit” (2017: 168). Likewise, Andersen stresses the religiously orthodox nature of Gracián's works when she states that “en Gracián la religión permanece como un fiel compañero de viaje sin convertirse en teología y sin entrar en conflicto con la filosofía”, and that, despite being largely implicit, “la voz de Gracián no deja de ser religiosa a lo largo de su actividad” (2008: 152 and 153, respectively). A product of these interpretations is that

Gracián's belief in salvation and in the Christian afterlife, and his rejection of nothingness, is asserted, shown when Andersen states that, for Gracián, "el proyecto vital es el evitar la nada, lo cual se hace haciéndose persona" (2008: 231–2), and when Rabone states that "there is clearly something religious about the immortality on offer here [in *El Criticón*], even if the specifics of a Christian heaven are absent" (2017: 209). With the belief that man can earn salvation after death via moral conduct during life, Gracián's optimistic conceptualisation of the earthly world is therefore stressed by these critics. Andersen, for example, with particular reference to *El Criticón*, writes that "la obra no es unívocamente pesimista, porque guarda la posibilidad y la clave para vencer la nada y aunque la felicidad no se encuentra en la tierra sigue existiendo la posibilidad de conseguir la inmortalidad y de hacer valer la vida" (2008: 233–4).

Furthermore, critics from the 2010s build upon the more nuanced interpretations of Gracián's ideas of *agudeza*, *ingenio*, and the *concepto*, carried out between 1990 and 2000, to support their optimistic readings of Gracián's work. Andersen recognises that conceptualising reason as logical and rationalistic, in Cartesian fashion, leads to a rigid mind/body duality, which views man as "at large a thinking thing and thinking was to be understood as logical and rationalistic, allowing no elements of imagination or invention, and the body was limited to being the host that houses the mind" (2013: 793; also stated in 2008: 171). This duality creates a barrier between man's subjectivity and the world around him, which causes him to retreat inwards for certainty and stability, whilst viewing the external world as hostile, suspicious, and deceitful. Andersen argues that Gracián does not follow this philosophical path, and instead conceptualises an alternative form of reason, *ingenio*, which approaches the world differently, functioning via imagination, invention, exterior stimuli, and engagement with the world. As a consequence, Andersen differentiates between two types of reason: reason which follows a "procedimiento lógico-especulativo", associated with Cartesian rationality, and reason as a "capacidad creativa e inventiva", which Gracián terms *ingenio* (2008: 12). In contrast to Cartesian rationality, *ingenio* "crea un puente entre el sujeto y el objeto", suturing the mind/body duality and meaning that, for Gracián, "el sujeto está relacionado con el mundo en el que existe, sólo existe porque tiene mundo. Existe en un contexto, vive en el mundo, es su condena pero también es su posibilidad de salvación" (Andersen 2008: 171 and 245, respectively). As such, the more nuanced

understanding of *ingenio* which emerged between 1990 and 2000, and which was refined in the 2010s, led to interpretations of Gracián's works which viewed him as optimistically engaged with the world, and not as pessimistically introspective and suspicious, for the reason that *ingenio* requires exterior stimuli to function.

Finally, another major contribution of critics working in the 2010s is the serious attention beginning to be paid to the Christian, and specifically to the Jesuit, context within which Gracián wrote his works. As pointed out by critics from the early twentieth century, Christianity itself incorporates both Optimism and Pessimism: Optimism stemming from “la dignidad del hombre, creado a imagen del Dios rey de la Creación”, and Pessimism stemming from “la bajeza mortal y el egoísmo feroz en el que el pecado original le ha hecho caer” (Fumaroli 2019: 17). As such, Christianity itself is, at its core, fundamentally paradoxical, optimistically believing in man's perfectibility above all, whilst simultaneously pessimistically believing that this perfectibility can only be attained after much struggle. Furthermore, Gracián was a member of the *Compañía de Jesús* and, as Fumaroli points out, this Order was known for aiming to “conciliar lo aparentemente inconciliabile” between the divine and the human, and between the “grandeza y bajeza del hombre” (2019: 17 and 44, respectively). Gracián's engagement with the optimistic and the pessimistic aspects of life, and with the dignity of man and with his baseness, as well as critics' ability to interpret him from either side of these paradoxes could, therefore, be considered as evidence of his religious orthodoxy and, particularly, of his conformity with the doctrine of the *Compañía de Jesús*. As Fumaroli states: “hoy no tenemos ninguna razón seria, salvo un viejo prejuicio convertido en lugar común universitario, para creer que Gracián [...] concibió una prudencia civil que sabía que era incompatible con su propia religión” (2019: 63).

Whilst from approximately 1960 to the 2000s secular and pessimistic readings of Gracián's works were, initially, dominant and, subsequently, equally as prevalent as religiously orthodox and optimistic interpretations, by the 2010s the latter strand of criticism once again emerged as dominant. The work of Robbins, spanning from 1998 to 2019, exemplifies this shift in critical viewpoint. Robbins' earlier criticism interprets Gracián's works as “fundamentally pessimistic” (2007: 202), presenting a “bleak picture of a world enmeshed in an endemic, existential deception which problematises every human interaction, every act of perception and every moral choice” (2007: 206), and in which “nothing and nobody is as they appear, everyone

and everything has something to conceal” (1998: 70). In his early criticism, Robbins argues that, for Gracián “man is alone in a world of deception” (1998: 70), and that he must therefore “neglect Christian ethics in pursuit of worldly advantage” (1998: 112). Furthermore, he argues for Gracián’s secularity by claiming that he rejects “the absolute truth of revealed religion” (1998: 70), and that “there is no sense in which God acts as an epistemic guarantor” in his works (2007: 206). For Robbins, “such an excessive absence of religion suggests a secularising drift in Gracián’s own moral thought and worldview” (2007: 206). And pivotally, he argues that Gracián’s works are “not driven by a desire to achieve salvation”, due to Gracián being “fundamentally pessimistic regarding both the human potential and the human desire” to gauge and to carry out moral action (2007: 223 and 202, respectively).

Nevertheless, Robbins’ later criticism presents a more tempered attitude towards the extent of Gracián’s secularity and Pessimism, and this shift in critical viewpoint appears to emerge due to more careful consideration of the religious context within which Gracián lived and worked, particularly that of the *Compañía de Jesús*. This begins in 2017 when Robbins argues that Gracián’s conceptualisation of prudence, rather than being morally neutral and Machiavellian, is actually indebted to Saint Thomas Aquinas, whose work profoundly influenced the doctrine of the Jesuits. This leads him to conclude, in contrast to his earlier criticism, that the *Oráculo* manifests a “strong Jesuit dimension” (2017: 50). Subsequently, in 2019, whilst considering the “largely irresistible” tendency to interpret Gracián as subversive and secular (2019: 131), Robbins poses the question: “what *is* secularity, and what might a manifestation of this mean in the early modern period?” (2019: 127). Whilst criticism throughout the twentieth century has seen secularity in Gracián’s works, Robbins suggests that taking into account the Jesuit context may enable critics to appreciate that what appears secular to a modern reader, in actual fact conforms to the religious precepts of the Jesuit context in which they were written: namely the concern for worldliness whilst never forgetting, and always holding in higher esteem, other-worldly salvation. Robbins therefore distinguishes between explicit profanity, which can be considered wholly secular, and a lack of overt concern with religion, which is compatible with the worldliness espoused by Jesuit doctrine (2019: 127). Whilst conceding that “gracián is imbued with an Ignatian mentality [Saint Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits] that easily looks calculating, worldly, and thus secular, particularly when placed against overt expressions of religiosity” (2019:

135), Robbins here argues that Gracián's works are not as secular as many interpretations, not least his own early criticism, have often argued.

Criticism of Gracián's works throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century can therefore be seen to have come full circle: just as Romera-Navarro, Coster, Bleuca, Batllori, Jankélévitch, and Correa Calderón took Gracián's religious orthodoxy for granted and, by extension, saw Optimism in his works, Anderson, Rabone, Fumaroli, and Robbins, too, take a similar approach. Nevertheless, the latter group of critics do two things differently: they use a more nuanced understanding of Gracián's concepts of *agudeza*, *ingenio*, and the *concepto*, and a more nuanced understanding of the doctrine of the *Compañía de Jesús*, to arrive at their religiously orthodox and optimistic interpretations. The *Crítica de reflexión* provides evidence that, even in the seventeenth century, the Jesuits were often considered to espouse an excessively worldly focus, sometimes even by their own members (Robbins 2019: 131), meaning that it is likely that secular and pessimistic interpretations of Gracián's works will periodically recur throughout time, depending upon historical circumstances and the temperament of the critic (Cantarino 2001: 23). Nevertheless, as Gracián's 'philosophy' and religious context become better understood, it seems likely, at this point, that his religious orthodoxy and Optimism will continue to be stressed.

### *Thesis Overview*

The critical stance of this thesis is that Gracián is religiously orthodox and fundamentally optimistic due to his belief in man's ability to perfect his moral status and, therefore, to attain salvation after death. The argument of this thesis is that Gracián's belief in man's perfectibility is manifest through his conceptualisation of the cardinal virtue of prudence as a form of *ingenio*; that is, a form of practical reason which can be honed through conscious and rational deliberation and practice, but which reaches its perfection when implemented instinctively, intuitively, and spontaneously.

As such, this thesis will continue the critical trend of the 2010s in three ways: by interpreting Gracián as religiously orthodox and optimistic, shown through his stress on morality, virtue, and salvation; by implementing a more nuanced understanding of *agudeza*, *ingenio*, and the *concepto* and, in doing so, bridging the

chasm between criticism which tends to focus exclusively on Gracián's political works (his treatises and *El Criticón*), and that which focuses specifically on his 'philosophy' (primarily outlined in the *Agudeza*); and by keeping in mind the Christian and Jesuit context of Gracián's works, namely the paradoxes between Optimism and Pessimism, and between the divine and the human, that this context entails.

In contrast to much criticism written on Gracián's works, the methodology of the thesis to follow will be to adhere closely and, for the most part, chronologically to Gracián's primary texts, drawing extensively upon specific examples and episodes to illustrate the points being made. In doing so, this thesis will aim to bring clarity to a writer whose works are notoriously dense and difficult, and which critics have, consequently, displayed a tendency to generalise.

Chapter two will examine the intellectual context within which Gracián was working in order to show that the conflicts between the divine and the human, between the other-worldly and the worldly, and between Optimism and Pessimism in his works were not particular to him, and are therefore not a sign of his subversiveness and secularity. Rather, these dualities were inherent in philosophy itself and they will be explored in this chapter through four intellectual movements: Neo-Platonism, Scepticism, Neo-Stoicism, and Jesuit doctrine. Whilst the Neo-Platonists optimistically reconciled these dualities, Scepticism, and the pessimistic belief that epistemological certainty is impossible for man, created a rupture between them. Generally, Spaniards of the seventeenth century turned away from the issue of epistemological uncertainty and, with an unshakeable belief in the metaphysical foundation of Christianity, instead focused their attention on the issue of morality. This led them to Neo-Stoicism, which provided a moral framework which was largely compatible with Christian doctrine. Finally, this chapter will consider Jesuit doctrine, particularly its Thomistic and Aristotelian conceptualisation of prudence, to show the way in which the *Compañía de Jesús*, much like the Neo-Platonists, aimed to reconcile the various conflicting dualities which characterised philosophy, and theology, of the time.

Chapter three will examine each of Gracián's treatises in turn which, for the purposes of this thesis, include: *El Héroe*, *El Político*, *El Discreto*, and the *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*. In carrying out this systematic and chronological analysis it will aim to show the way in which Gracián's thinking developed

throughout this early stage of his literary career, and to combat the common assumption that the *Oráculo* alone can be considered representative of his thought. This chapter will stress the interpretative indeterminacy of Gracián's treatises, which tend to be marked by contradiction, examined through the filter of three primary debates: the extent to which Gracián espouses a Machiavellian approach to the world, or an approach which stresses the importance of Christian virtue; the extent to which Gracián views the exterior world with hostility and suspicion, or recommends participation in and engagement with it; and the extent to which Gracián supports the idea that good Fortune and noble birth are prerequisites for success, or encourages hard work in order to sculpt one's destiny. The treatises provide ample material for interpretations from both sides of these debates, indicating that Gracián was grappling inconclusively with the dualities which characterised his era at this point in his career. Despite this ambivalence, several key ideas emerge throughout the treatises as central to his worldview: his 'philosophy', namely the epistemological and aesthetic functions of *ingenio*, and the growing centrality granted to prudence and virtue.

Chapter four will shift from an analysis of Gracián's more political works to an analysis of his 'philosophy', examined through his ideas of *agudeza*, *ingenio*, and the *concepto*, outlined in the *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*. This chapter will show that Gracián's conceptualisation of these ideas does not lie within the remit of rhetoric, or within the remit of the purely intellectual. Building upon the roots of Gracián's thinking in the philosophy of Francisco Suárez, particularly his idea of the *conceptus*, it will show that Gracián's ideas of *agudeza* and the *concepto* are ontologically dependent upon each other, meaning that the *concepto* is not an idea in the mind which then becomes an *agudeza* upon articulation. Rather, the *agudeza* and the *concepto* come into being instantaneously. In other words, the *ser* and the *parecer* of the *concepto/agudeza* come into existence at the same time. This means that the *concepto/agudeza*, in its most perfect form, arises intuitively and spontaneously, and does not necessitate a rational process of deliberation in order to come into being. Nevertheless, this chapter will also examine the potential that Gracián sees for man to mould his *ingenio* through practice, and thereby to refine his ability to perceive and simultaneously to articulate *conceptos/agudezas*. Finally, this chapter will consider the epistemological ramifications of Gracián's conceptualisation of the *concepto/agudeza*, showing that, due to the intuitive but transient nature of the moment in which *ingenio* perceives and articulates the *concepto/agudeza*, the insight

provided by it is akin to the *admiratio* produced by aesthetic experience. *Ingenio* therefore provides an awareness of, and an insight into, universality and into the divine, even if this does not lead to an understanding of it.

Chapter five, through an analysis of *El Criticón*, will intertwine Gracián's political and social bent with his 'philosophy' in order to show that, at this later stage of his literary career, he had largely learned to accept and to live with the paradoxical dualities of his philosophical and theological era. Whilst in the *Agudeza*, *ingenio* functioned within the remits of ontology, aesthetics, and epistemology, in *El Criticón*, Gracián extends the function of *ingenio* to include morality too. He does this by depicting prudence to function in the same way as *ingenio*, and by thereby showing that man himself, in the moment of carrying out virtuous conduct informed by prudence, becomes a *concepto/agudeza*, which entails insight into the universal/the divine. Just as the *concepto* cannot reside purely in the intellect and is necessarily intertwined with its articulation as an *agudeza*, virtue, too, cannot be theoretical and must be articulated in the world through practical action. Like *ingenio*, prudence, in its most perfect form, occurs intuitively and spontaneously but, as hinted in the *Agudeza*, it can also be refined through deliberated practice. Gracián novelises the process of perfecting one's prudence throughout *El Criticón*, by the end of which Critilo and Andrenio are finally able to implement prudence intuitively and instinctively, without a prior process of conscious and rational deliberation, representing their attainment of moral perfection.

Chapter six, by way of conclusion, will briefly comment upon *El Comulgatorio* in order to suggest that interpretations of this text as a disingenuous concession by Gracián to the *Compañía de Jesús*, aimed towards asserting his religious orthodoxy after having published the first two parts of the 'profane' *El Criticón* without permission, are misunderstood. Given the ontological dependence, that this thesis will outline, between the *concepto* and *agudeza*, and subsequently between man with a knowledge of the virtuous course of action and man as he carries out this virtuous course of action, and given the aesthetic nature of the moment in which the *concepto/agudeza* and virtue are perceived/articulated, it is consistent that Gracián's attention be drawn to the Eucharist: a ceremony in which man transiently, and paradoxically, incorporates God within his earthly being. Just as the moment of the *concepto/agudeza*, and the moment of virtue, provide insight into universality in aesthetic fashion, the moment of the Eucharist actualises the presence of the divine

within man. Whilst in *El Comulgatorio*, the religiosity and other-worldliness of this experience is made explicit, in his 'profane' works, the same experience, in conformity with Jesuit doctrine, is tempered by a worldliness which, arguably, renders it more accessible and comprehensible to readers less trained in the abstract rites and sacraments of Christianity.

## Chapter Two: Intellectual Context

Gracián's apprenticeship with the *Compañía de Jesús*, his subsequent roles as teacher of philosophy, teacher of theology, preacher, and confessor, as well as his association with the literary circle that surrounded Lastanosa, all highlight the fact that he is an especially intellectually-engaged and philosophically-minded writer. His experience of court life and his involvement in the Catalan Revolt, first with the Duke of Nochera and then at the Battle of Lérida, also make him a writer whose contemplative bent is tempered by an awareness of current affairs and of the importance of strong leadership. The combination of contemplative study and practical experience that Gracián's life incorporates means that the philosophical branches upon which his works touch are particularly broad, including theology, politics, rhetoric, ontology, epistemology, aesthetics, and morality. The breadth of Gracián's philosophical interests grants his works an erudition that often renders them seemingly impenetrable to the modern reader. This chapter elucidates some of the intellectual currents of thought which inform Gracián's thinking and to which his works respond. Some of these currents, and their partisans, we know to be direct influences due to the fact that they are referenced by Gracián himself (Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Petrarch, Niccolò Machiavelli, Baldassare Castiglione, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Justus Lipsius, Francisco de Quevedo, and Neo-Stoicism, for example). Others are not directly referenced by Gracián, but are nonetheless taken to be ubiquitous in intellectual circles of the time (Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Pietro Pomponazzi, Neo-Platonism, and Cartesian Rationalism, for example).

Gracián's works, like those of most philosophically-engaged writers, are marked by and respond to a set of dualities which have characterised philosophy, both Western and otherwise, throughout time. These dualities arise from man's unique ability to acknowledge his humanity, and the possibilities and limitations that this entails, as well as to conceptualise theoretically the existence of something greater and more divine, beyond this humanity. As this chapter will go on to outline, philosophical thinking tends to fluctuate between the prioritisation of these two extremes, at times elevating man's inherent humanity above all else and, at other times, holding this humanity in contempt and elevating divinity in its place. Consciousness of the duality between the divine and the human is expressed

philosophically in several different ways, including: differentiating between transcendence and immanence; between objectivity and subjectivity; between interiority and exteriority; between metaphysical contemplation and ethical action; between other-worldliness and this-worldliness; between the universal and the particular; and, as conceptualised by thinkers of the Spanish Baroque, between the realms of *ser* and *parecer*. Although it is not an unproblematic schematisation, the roots of these dualities are often considered to originate in the pagan philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, the former considered to elevate the metaphysical and other-worldly realm of universal ‘concepts’ or ‘forms’ above all else (the divine), the latter considered to elevate the worldly realm, the scientific study of particulars, and morality above all else (the human).<sup>5</sup> As is to be expected from a culture dominated by Christianity, and by the associated ideas of immortality and salvation, writers of the Renaissance and Baroque never desired to eschew the divine side of these dualities, which means that thinking from this era either treats humanity with contempt and elevates the divine in its place (e.g. Ficino, Petrarch, and Cartesian Rationalism), or aims to reconcile the divine and the human (e.g. Pico, Pomponazzi, Castiglione, Neo-Platonism, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Lipsius, Neo-Stoicism, and Quevedo). As this thesis will go on to demonstrate, Gracián accepts man’s inherent humanity and finds a way to reconcile it with divinity, displaying a reconciliatory spirit which aligns his philosophy with that of the latter group of thinkers.

This chapter will track the fluctuating emphasis placed upon the two sides of these dichotomies in the time leading up to Gracián’s works. First, it will examine the Optimism of Renaissance Neo-Platonism, and the way in which this movement aimed to reconcile the world of particulars with universal insight, imbuing the worldly with meaning and purpose as a route via which the other-worldly could be accessed. Next, it will consider the rise of Scepticism, which ruptured the optimistic reconciliation between the human and the divine achieved by the Neo-Platonists. For the Sceptics, human perception and sense experience were intrinsically deceptive, making it impossible for man to obtain epistemological certainty about the world. For Descartes

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<sup>5</sup> However, Lovejoy, for example, has argued that Plato, in fact, expresses “a particularly exuberant kind of this-worldliness” (45) due to the fact that in chapter ten of the *Republic* he points out that contemplation of the absolute oneness of the ‘Idea of the Good’ simultaneously entails its opposite, actualisation in the worldly realm of the infinitely many (225), meaning that the divine and the human, the other-worldly and the worldly, are mutually dependent and only have meaning through contrast with each other.

in particular, the only certainty to be found lay in man's interiority, in the spark of reason which served as a mark of his divinity. In this way, Cartesian Scepticism treats that which is human about man (e.g. the body, the senses) with contempt, and elevates the divine (i.e. the mind, reason) in its place. However, while France tended to follow the route of Cartesianism, Spanish thinkers tended to set aside the issue of epistemological certainty, and to focus instead on the issue of morality. This chapter will then examine Neo-Stoicism and the way in which it provided a model of morality which was popular amongst Christian Spaniards, for the focus it placed on cultivating virtue, and on the paradox between Providence/fate and free will that Neo-Stoicism, like Christianity, incorporated. Finally, this chapter will consider the Jesuit context within which Gracián was trained and worked, examining, in particular, the balance between the worldly and the other-worldly that the Jesuits were known for aiming to strike. The debate about the success or failure of their balance between the human and the divine is manifest in the idea of prudence: prudence, politicised as Machiavellian, worldly wisdom can be considered to stress excessively the worldly side of the Jesuit enterprise. However, prudence, conceptualised by Aristotle and Aquinas, as a virtue, carried out in the earthly realm, to be rewarded in the divine realm after death, succeeds in reconciling the worldly and the other-worldly. As such, Jesuit thinking in general, and Gracián's thinking in particular, via the issue of prudence, incorporates and works with the dualities which are inherent in philosophy itself. Moreover, it approaches them with a reconciliatory spirit which rejects the Pessimism of Cartesian Scepticism and instead embraces the version of morality offered by Neo-Stoicism, a positive model whose Optimism is reminiscent of that of the Renaissance Neo-Platonists.

### *The Renaissance: The Reconciliatory Optimism of Neo-Platonism*

In the early Middle Ages, thinkers such as Saint Augustine (354–430AD) were influential. Augustine's work drew inspiration from Plato's philosophy and subsequently elevated its apparent emphasis on other-worldly contemplation of the oneness of God, meaning that a Platonic focus infused the thinking of the early Middle Ages too. However, in the twelfth century Aristotle's corpus was translated into Latin, providing medieval scholars, notably Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), with an almost complete philosophical system from which to learn and to teach

(Kristeller 1965: 132). With this translation came a new focus on this-worldliness, manifest through the characteristically Aristotelian scientific study of particulars and concern with ethics. Aristotelian philosophy therefore permeated a theology which had hitherto been based upon metaphysical contemplation of other-worldly Platonic 'forms'. Platonic and Aristotelian ideas aligned with different facets of Christianity, meaning that both were assimilated easily into theological doctrine, and this assimilation of two philosophies which seemingly contradict each other in certain respects reveals a contradiction inherent in Christianity itself: if the aim of man's life is to worship other-worldly divinity and to attain access to divinity after death, then what value does man's life in the worldly realm hold? Lovejoy articulates this conundrum:

If the good for man was the contemplation or the imitation of God, this required, on the one hand, a transcendence and suppression of the merely 'natural' interests and desires, a withdrawal of the soul from 'the world' the better to prepare it for the beatific vision of the divine perfection; and it required, on the other hand, a piety towards the God of things as they are, an adoring delight in the sensible universe in all its variety, an endeavour on man's part to know and understand it ever more fully, and a conscious participation in the divine activity of creation (316).

God, as a divine being, transcends the world, and Christian man is faced with the possibility of choosing to turn away from the world in order to contemplate better the glory of its creator. However, as creator of the world, God is also immanent in every aspect of his creation, and Christian man is faced with the alternative possibility of choosing to participate in the variety of God's handiwork in order to experience fully its glory. Whilst God can simultaneously be transcendent and immanent, man cannot, and is instead presented with two ways of showing his devotion to God: through introspective contemplation or through practical action.

For a long time, these two alternative paths were both accepted as legitimate and Christianity demonstrated what Kristeller has termed a "double truth mentality" (1965: 115; 1972: 46). This mentality accepted that practical participation in the world was a rational and logical path for man to want to follow, as per Aristotle's teachings, but elevated pure contemplation of the divine as the more theologically valid choice, as per other-worldly interpretations of Plato's teachings. Nevertheless, as Christianity transitioned from medieval times to the early Renaissance, Christian thinkers started to perceive the danger of the 'double truth' mentality: by condoning Aristotle's focus on ethics and practical action, Christianity could be considered to

sanction the view that participation in the worldly realm is the objective of human life. However, as per Christian doctrine, the objective of human life is to attain immortality after death. Death, the possibility of life after death, and the idea of immortality do not feature strongly in Aristotle's works. On the other hand, Plato, in the final chapter of the *Republic*, offers a pagan version of immortality which takes for granted that the soul is immortal (363–6). As such, Christian thinkers of the early Renaissance break the balance of the 'double truth' mentality, and swing towards a preference for Platonic philosophy, and for showing devotion to God through retreat from the world via the route of introspective contemplation. The elevation of Platonic philosophy, the contemplative turn inwards and, at times, an active disdain for Aristotelian thinking is demonstrated, for example, in Petrarch's *Ascesa al monte Ventoso* (1336) and *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* (1367), and culminates in Marsilio Ficino's *Theologia platonica, De immortalitate animorum* (1482). Ficino, in particular, sets about providing a rational explanation for the necessity of the immortality of the soul, in order to allay the doubts which can arise from immortality being considered a pure article of faith.

Nevertheless, as the Renaissance proper gets into its stride, Christian thinkers redress this Platonic and contemplative turn, and assert the value of the worldly and of the human once again, resulting in a renewed synthesis of Platonic and Aristotelian thought which is referred to as Neo-Platonism. We see this begin in the work of Pico della Mirandola, develop in the work of Pietro Pomponazzi, and culminate in the work of Baldassare Castiglione, each of whom stresses the value of the human and the worldly in different ways. Pico, for example, in his *Oratio de hominis dignitate* (1496), retains a residual affinity towards contemplation of the divine, but conceptualises contemplation in such a way that it can be reconciled with practical action. For Pico, man is a liminal being: "stabilis evi et fluxi temporis interstitium" (110).<sup>6</sup> This means that he can therefore choose whether to descend into the most base of lifeforms or to ascend to the most divine, demonstrating the optimistic idea that man is the moulder of himself: "tu, nullis angustiis cohercitus, pro tuo arbitrio, in cuius manu te posui, tibi illam prefinies" (116).<sup>7</sup> However, he distinguishes between two types of access to the divine by differentiating between two types of

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<sup>6</sup> "Man is the midpoint between fixed eternity and fleeting time" (111).

<sup>7</sup> "But you, constrained by no limits, may determine your nature for yourself, according to your own free will, in whose hands we have placed you" (117).

contemplation: Seraphic and Cherubic. Seraphic contemplation is pure contemplation which entails absolute absorption in love for the creator and a rejection of the earthly, aligning it with the type of contemplation posited by Petrarch and Ficino. Pico writes of this type of contemplation: “si purum contemplatorem corporis nescium, in penetralia mentis relegatum, hic non terrenum, non caeleste animal: hic augustius est numen, humana carne circumvestitum” (132).<sup>8</sup> Cherubic contemplation, on the other hand, maintains a connection to the earthly world. Pico describes it as a form of contemplation that raises a person to seraphic heights, but which then allows him to descend back to the earthly world and put this new perspective into practice: “hic nobis et emulandus primo et ambiendus, atque adeo comprehendendus est, unde et ad amoris rapiamur fastigia, et ad munera actionum bene instructi paratique descendamus” (140).<sup>9</sup> Through Cherubic contemplation man is granted temporary access to the divine, providing him with an insight which he can then take back to, and implement in, the worldly realm. Whilst Seraphic contemplation turns away entirely from the human and the worldly, Cherubic contemplation reconciles introspective contemplation with practical action by presenting a model within which contemplation of, and insight into, the divine can then help to inform the way in which man acts in the worldly realm. Pico himself concludes: “proposuimus primo Platonis Aristotelisque concordiam, a multis ante hac creditam, a nemine satis probatam” (216).<sup>10</sup> He therefore builds upon the Platonic emphasis of his time to propose a world view which rates pure contemplation highly, but which also suggests a way in which contemplation can be reconciled with an active life in the worldly realm.

Like Pico, Pomponazzi reacts against the Platonic turn of Petrarch and Ficino. Unlike Pico, he does this by presenting a worldview in which the worldly realm and practical action hold value in themselves, detached from the idea of contemplation of the divine. Whilst Ficino sought to prove the necessity of the immortality of the soul using reason, instead of simply accepting it as an article of faith, Pomponazzi accepts

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<sup>8</sup> “If you see a pure contemplator, oblivious to his body and absorbed in the recesses of his mind, this is neither an earthly nor a heavenly creature: this is a still more eminent spirit, clothed in human flesh” (133).

<sup>9</sup> “First we must emulate him, thirst after him and to the same degree understand him in order that we may be raised from him to the heights of love and descend from him, well taught and prepared, to the duties of the active life” (141).

<sup>10</sup> “In the first place, I have proposed the concord of Plato and Aristotle, believed by many before me but adequately proven by none” (217).

the immortality of the soul as a given and instead focuses on the value to be found in human life. As such, for Pomponazzi, the necessity of the immortality of the soul does not dictate that man must retreat from the world during life, in order to better prepare himself to ascend to divinity upon death. Rather, worthwhile and satisfying participation in the worldly realm can coexist with immortality. The reason why Pomponazzi takes this approach is because he does not believe that introspective contemplation can lead to any kind of insight into the divine, instead believing that man's access to universality always comes via the filter of the particular. In his *De immortalitate animae* (1516) he presents his theory of the intellect, which builds upon an ambiguous line which he quotes from Aristotle's *De Anima*: "si intelligere est phantasia, aut non sine phantasia" (86).<sup>11</sup> Pomponazzi interprets this line to mean that the intellect is always moved to cognition by something exterior to itself. This means that the intellect and cognition are dependent upon quantity and matter (i.e. the worldly) because "intellectio ipsa non posset exerceri nisi modo quantitativo et corporali" (114).<sup>12</sup> 'Pure' cognition, akin to the detached contemplation proposed by Petrarch and Ficino, is impossible because the human intellect always sees the universal in the singular. Pomponazzi stresses this by pointing out that whenever we try to conceptualise something we always form a bodily image of it in our minds: our intellect is rooted in succession, time, and the material world, and cannot reach any kind of atemporal understanding unless prompted by external, material stimuli.

Having established the dependence of human intellect on the worldly realm, Pomponazzi then puts forward a model which differentiates between the theoretical, the practical, and the productive intellects. Theoretical intellect is the highest gift of the gods, belonging to the realm of the angels, whilst productive intellect is the lowest of intellects, proper to the mechanical functions of the animals. In line with his liminal status between these two extremes, as a human being with an awareness of divinity, man's proper place is in the realm of the practical intellect and he should participate perfectly within it. The perfection of the practical intellect, achieved through repeatedly making moral and virtuous decisions, therefore becomes the aim of man's life and the source of his relative happiness. Pomponazzi explains: "agricola enim vel faber, egenus vel dives, si moralis existet, felix nuncupari potest, et vere

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<sup>11</sup> "Intellect is imagination, or not without imagination" (Cassirer et al. 1956: 293).

<sup>12</sup> "Knowing is always exercised in a quantitative and corporeal way" (Cassirer et al. 1956: 319).

nuncupatur, sorteque sua contentus abibit” (192).<sup>13</sup> For Pomponazzi, practical action in the worldly realm therefore trumps introspective contemplation as both the stimulus for intellectual cognition and the means via which man can achieve a relative happiness proper to his station as a human being. In this way, he presents a model in which morality and virtue (relative, worldly happiness) coexist with immortality (other-worldly Happiness), and this idea is reiterated almost exactly by Gracián in 3.IX of *El Criticón*, when the interlocutors during a discussion on the nature of Happiness conclude that prudence is the pinnacle of human happiness (discussed in more detail in chapter five).

Castiglione’s *Il libro del Cortegiano* (1528) is often cited as the text most representative of Renaissance Neo-Platonism, demonstrating a balanced synthesis between Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical systems, and between the various dualities which define philosophical thinking: between the contemplative and the active, between the other-worldly and the worldly, between the universal and the particular, and between the divine and the human. In the first half of the fourth book Castiglione presents a dialogue between Ottaviano Fregoso, Gaspare Pallavicino, Cesare Gonzaga, Giuliano de Medici, and Pietro Bembo in which the virtuousness of continence and temperance is discussed (representing the overcoming of strong emotion and the ability to regulate emotion, respectively). Ottaviano defines virtue, stating: “la virtù si po quasi dir una prudenzia ed un sapere eleggere il bene” (12417). As such, for Ottaviano, virtue is practical action which results from the necessity of choosing the virtuous choice when both virtue and vice present themselves. Ottaviano specifies that choosing the virtuous course of action due to complete control of the emotions (temperance) is superior to choosing the virtuous course of action after being tempted by vice (continence), stating,

La temperanzia libera da ogni perturbazione è simile a quel capitano, che senza contrasto vince e regna, ed avendo in quell’animo dove si ritrova non solamente sedato, ma in tutto estinto il foco delle cupidità, come bon principe in guerra civile, distrugge i sediziosi nemici intrinsechi e dona lo scettro e dominio intiero alla ragione (12480).

The characters of the dialogue engage in a discussion about this point of view, in which they conclude that the level of temperance presented by Ottaviano is not fitting

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<sup>13</sup> “This power can make almost anyone blessed. For farmer or smith, destitute or rich, if his life be moral, can be called happy, and truly so called, and can depart contented with his lot” (Cassirer et al. 1956: 357).

for a prince, but only “a qualche monaco o eremita” (12478), due to the fact that it would make him “piú presto semideo che uom mortale” (12574). Giuliano de Medici, for example, questions Ottaviano’s point of view stating,

Ed a me pare che quella virtù la quale, essendo nell’animo nostro discordia tra la ragione e l’appetito, comate e dà la vittoria alla ragione si debba estimar piú perfetta che quell’ache vince non avendo cupidità ne affetto alcuno che le contrasto; perché pare che quell’animo non si astenga dal male per virtù, ma resti di farlo perché non ne abbia volontà (12456).

Therefore, throughout the first half of part four of *Il libro del Cortegiano*, Castiglione shows his belief that the emotions are central to man’s experience as man and that the repression of emotion is unfitting. In other words, the introspective and contemplative state endorsed by Petrarch and Ficino is unsuitable for man, whose role is to test his virtue, to recognise the pulls against it, and to make moral and prudent choices despite them.

Having rejected the Platonic self-containedness of Petrarch and Ficino, the latter half of the fourth book of *Il libro del Cortegiano* is dedicated to Castiglione’s famous exposition of Platonic love, in which he expounds the way in which his Neo-Platonic synthesis between the active and the contemplative, and the particular and the universal, functions. First, Castiglione explains, man loves a physical manifestation of beauty, but he must “servirsi di questo amore come d’un grado per ascendere ad un altro molto piú sublime” (13401). To do this, man must amass many particular instances of earthly beauty in his mind and, “cumulando insieme tutte le bellezze farà un concetto universale e ridurrà la moltitudine d’esse alla unità di quella sola” (13401). Castiglione therefore proposes a model in which universality, and divinity, can be accessed via particularity, and the worldly. Echoing Pomponazzi, he expresses the idea that “human imagination is a corporeal faculty [which] acquires knowledge only through the data supplied to it by the senses”, meaning that human cognition is dependent upon quantity and matter (i.e. the worldly). A further consequence of this is that the image of pure beauty which man holds in his mind, after abstracting from many particular instances of beauty, still tends to retain a bodily, quantitative form (13423). With the aim of casting off this bodily form and conceiving of something more universal and ethereal, Castiglione postulates a second stage of abstraction which sees man abstract from his own particular intellect to the universal idea of intellect, after which he, “senza velo o nube alcuna vede l’amplo mare della pura bellezza divina ed in sé lo riceve, e gode quella suprema felicità che

dai sensi è incomprendibile” (14853). As such, he reconciles the particular and the universal, seeing active participation in the human world and immersion in worldly particulars as a necessary first step on the path towards pure awareness and cognition of the divine.

Neo-Platonic thinkers, such as Pico, Pomponazzi, and Castiglione, in their different ways, therefore optimistically overcome the difficulties posed by the dualities which characterised philosophy of the time. They do so by infusing the worldly realm with significance and purpose and by, in turn, imbuing man himself with dignity and potential: pure contemplation and cognition of the divine is beyond man’s station, but he can use that which is human about himself (corporeality, the senses, imagination, the human intellect) in order to gain a kind of access to universality and divinity which is fitting to his status as a human being. In a similar vein to Gracián, the access to the divine which the Neo-Platonists postulate is temporary, contingent, and akin to aesthetic experience. The aesthetic nature of Neo-Platonic access to the divine is frequently referred to as ‘divine frenzy’ or ‘divine furore’, and it is precisely this state of aesthetic rapture or *admiratio* upon which Gracián theorises through the ideas of the *concepto*, *agudeza*, and *ingenio* in the *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*, examined in more detail in chapter four (Grady 34; Parker 1982: 27; Fernández-Corugedo 31, 189–93). Also noteworthy, for its alignment with Gracián’s thinking, is the fact that the Neo-Platonists reconcile reverence for the divine with active participation in the world, stressing the ideas of virtue and prudence, and showing a dedication to morality which Gracián, too, shares (see chapters three and five).

### *Scepticism: The Search for Epistemological Certainty*

Whilst Neo-Platonism emerged during the early-sixteenth century as an optimistic and reconciliatory worldview, during the late-sixteenth and seventeenth Centuries, classical works by Pyrrhonian Sceptics, such as Pyrrho of Elis, Aenesidemus, and Sextus Empiricus, were rediscovered. This rediscovery coincided with a spate of political failures for Spain which made it a fertile ground for the rise of Sceptical ideas. Scepticism is the belief that all claims to human knowledge are false and that any knowledge we have of the external world is fallible due to our reliance on the senses, which are fundamentally untrustworthy and unreliable (Robbins 1998: 22).

The resurgence of Sceptical ideas, alongside the Reformation of the sixteenth century, the Thirty Years War between 1618 and 1648, and the loss of territories such as the Spanish Netherlands, Naples, and Milan (Robbins 1998: 19), meant that there was a political instability in Spain which complemented the rise of a philosophy whose foundation was doubt and uncertainty.<sup>14</sup>

There are two types of Scepticism: the first is Academic Scepticism, propounded by Cicero, which postulates that no knowledge is possible, that nothing is certain, and that the best information we can gain is only probable. The second type is Pyrrhonian Scepticism, propounded by Pyrrho of Elis, Aenesidemus, and Sextus Empiricus, which postulates that the Academic Sceptics' statement that no knowledge is possible is itself a statement of fact for which there is no proof. The Pyrrhonian Sceptics therefore take Scepticism one step further by postulating that nothing can be known, not even that we can know nothing. Both types of Scepticism place in doubt the existence of a basis upon which we can build certain knowledge. Academic Scepticism represents a kind of mitigated Scepticism: we can know nothing for certain, but we can nonetheless build a working, probable knowledge about the world which is sufficient for everyday purposes (Popkin 150). Pyrrhonian Scepticism, on the other hand, is unable to move beyond the lack of a foundation for knowledge, leaving man paralysed in an epistemological void.

Martin Luther, in texts such as his *Ninety-Five Theses* (1517), contributed towards the period's sense of angst and uncertainty by challenging Christianity's blind faith in the truths preached by the Catholic Church, and by urging laypeople to reject the unquestioned and unexamined beliefs of the Church in favour of interpreting the Bible themselves. On the other hand, Erasmus of Rotterdam, in works such as *Stultitiae Laus* (1511) and *De libero arbitrio diatribe sive collatio* (1524), defended the Catholic Church, argued that exegesis of the Bible requires dedication and skill which most laypeople lack, and urged Christians to accept Biblical truths based on faith alone, setting aside the quest for certainty and instead focusing their energies on living a Christian and moral life. In this sense, Erasmus demonstrates the essence of Academic Scepticism: leaving behind the epistemological quagmire of absolute, Pyrrhonian uncertainty, and instead focusing on acting ethically within the

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<sup>14</sup> For more details on the history of this period see, for example, Elliott 1970 and 1984.

framework of a Christian world, whose existence and reality can be accepted as true based on faith alone.

Whilst many Christians were able to follow Erasmus in accepting the reality of the world as an article of faith, and in constructing their morality on top of the foundation of Christian metaphysics, René Descartes, much like Ficino in the fifteenth century, sought to provide proof of the reality of the world which was based upon rational argumentation and not upon blind faith. To do so he employed his ‘Method of Doubt’ which aimed to doubt the certainty of absolutely everything, in order to arrive at first principles, purified of any lingering doubt, which could then serve as an indubitable foundation for knowledge. In his *Discours de la méthode* (1637), Descartes sets himself the task of discovering something which is clearly and distinctly true, and certain beyond doubt. He employs the usual Sceptical method of placing experiences provided by the senses in doubt, but he goes further than this too by proposing that our perceptions may have been dreams or may have been tricks carried out by an evil demon. The conclusion of the *Discours* is that the only indubitable thing is the self:

Je pris garde que, pendant que je voulais ainsi penser que tout était faux, il fallait nécessairement que moi, qui le pensais, fusse quelque chose. En remarquant que cette vérité: *je pense, donc, je suis*, était si ferme et si assurée, que toutes les plus extravagantes suppositions des sceptiques n’étaient pas capables de l’ébranler, je jugeais que je pouvais le recevoir, sans scrupule, pour le premier principe de la philosophie, que je cherchais (66).

Descartes arrives at the conclusion that the only indubitable thing is the self via the realisation that the act of doubting requires a being who doubts, the existence of which cannot be doubted any further. The existence of the self, and the famous maxim, ‘Cogito ergo sum’, therefore constitutes Descartes’ first principle, upon which all other knowledge can be built.

Furthermore, Descartes makes clear that the self to which he refers is the incorporeal, thinking self and not the corporeal, bodily self. He clarifies this in his later work, the *Méditations* (1641), when considering if the self would still exist if thinking ceased. He concludes that the self would not exist if it did not think: “je ne suis donc, précisément parlant, qu’une chose qui pense, c’est-à-dire un esprit, un entendement ou une raison” (50). For Descartes, only reason, the mind, the soul, the incorporeal substance within us, is granted the status of true being, whilst the body is perpetually plagued by, and relegated to the realm of, doubt. Cartesian Rationalism, the belief that interior reason constitutes the only thing of indubitable existence,

therefore creates a rigid mind/body duality. The suspicion and scorn towards all things exterior to the mind which results from this duality is not dissimilar to the attitude adopted by Petrarch and Ficino in their elevation of introspective contemplation and their rejection of the worldly realm. Cartesian Rationalism picks up on this antecedent, representing a reversal of the optimistic reconciliations carried out by the Neo-Platonists between Platonism and Aristotelianism, between introspective contemplation and practical action, between the universal and the particular, and between the divine and the human.

Nevertheless, whilst Cartesian Rationalism took a firm hold over the rest of Europe, and over France in particular, this strand of extreme Scepticism never gained the same traction in Spain, which always retained a religious and ideological conservatism. This conservatism is manifest in several ways. For example: in 1478 the Spanish Inquisition was established, with the aim of maintaining Catholic orthodoxy and punishing transgressions from it; in 1492 the Americas were discovered by the *reyes católicos*, Ferdinand and Isabella, which united the country in a Christianising, and Catholicising, mission; in 1519 the Spaniard Charles V became Holy Roman Emperor which led to a preference for unity within the Holy Roman Empire and for reform of the Catholic Church to come from within (as opposed to abolishing the Catholic Church and replacing it with the Protestant Church); and between 1545 and 1563 the Council of Trent was convened, clarifying and strengthening Catholic dogma, and sparking the Counter Reformation. As such, despite political instability facilitating the reception and spread of Sceptical philosophy in Spain, the country's religious conservatism, institutionalised through the Inquisition and the Counter Reformation, prevented it from taking the Sceptical philosophy of doubt to extreme lengths in Cartesian fashion.

As Robbins has argued, Catholic Spaniards of the seventeenth century tended to disregard the epistemological uncertainty engendered by the rise of Scepticism and to accept instead the metaphysical basis of Christianity and to use it as a foundation upon which to build a morality: man might not be able to understand why or how the world exists, but it patently exists nonetheless, and his energies are better directed at learning to navigate the world morally, than at speculating upon metaphysical questions, the answers to which are beyond his intellectual capabilities. In this way, Robbins argues, attaining moral certainty was more important in Spain than epistemological certainty. He writes that Spaniards of this time,

Held a firm belief in the accessibility of certainty and truth sufficient to enable correct action as a moral agent. At the heart of their thinking lies a concern with what might be termed moral perception rather than with perception *per se*. Knowledge equates with moral knowledge, and so value judgement, the discernment of good from bad, is made a prerequisite of a correct understanding and interpretation of the external world. This means that the essence of an object or concept is held to be its moral value, and this is understood purely in terms of whether it is good or bad for the salvation of the soul (2007: 39).

Robbins describes the way in which Christian Spaniards of the seventeenth century reconfigured what human knowledge was considered to be. Epistemological certainty was an unattainable ideal for man, accessible only to the divine, whereas moral certainty was within man's remit. Robbins goes on to comment that,

Whilst it might be argued that such knowledge is primarily moral knowledge, many Spaniards...were prepared to equate precisely such knowledge with knowledge *per se*, given that salvation was held by most as the primary objective of human agency (Robbins 2007: 49).

Spaniards of this time therefore demonstrate a dedication to the Christian idea of salvation, which is earned through carrying out moral and virtuous conduct throughout life, which, consequently, requires active participation in the world. Whilst Descartes turned inwards, towards interior reason, for epistemological certainty, Spanish thinkers projected outwards, towards interaction with the world, for moral certainty. This outlook accepted that man's intellect was not sufficient to access and to comprehend metaphysical truths, and this acceptance of man's epistemological and metaphysical limitations, and the realisation that man's role lies firmly within the remit of morality, is at the core of the Spanish concept of *desengaño*. In *El Criticón*, Gracián novelises this process of *desengaño* through the characters of Critilo and Andrenio, and in 3.IX of the novel we finally witness them come to the realisation that seeking epistemological certainty, Truth, or Happiness (represented by Felisinda), is futile. Instead, preparing oneself for salvation after death, via moral action during life (which leads to relative worldly happiness rather than Happiness) should be the focus of their efforts.

The Spanish acceptance of man's epistemological limitations is manifest in the works of Francisco Sánchez and Francisco de Quevedo. In 1581, the Spanish-Portuguese Sánchez published his *Quod nihil scitur* in which he criticises a scientific method which induces general principles from the observation of particulars. Sánchez argues that it is not possible to state such broad generalisations as fact due to their being beyond the scope of man's comprehension: only God can achieve the viewpoint

required to come to such all-encompassing conclusions about the world, and man's ability to abstract is not a substitute for God's ability to conceptualise permanently his creation and to hold it in atemporal awareness. For Sánchez, "truly meaningful scientific knowledge cannot be known. All that man can achieve is limited, imperfect knowledge of some things which are present in his experience through observation and judgement" (Popkin 41). He therefore sets aside the goal of obtaining certain and objective knowledge about the real essence of things, and in its place, proposes a scientific method whose end is contingent and practical knowledge of particulars. Popkin explains further why objective, scientific knowledge was not possible for Spaniards of this time, stating,

The basic difficulty in the attempt to know the principles of nature is that nature is the free manifestation of God's will, and is not bound by the rules of Aristotle or Euclid. The only way of comprehending the reasons why things happen is through knowledge of God. But the physicists, in refusing to recognise that such information can only be obtained by Revelation and not by man's weak faculties, insist upon trying to impose their rules on God's actions and manifestations... The attempt to discover the principles of nature is actually a kind of blasphemy, an attempt to restrict and limit God's freedom (93-4).

As such, the search for epistemological certainty represents man's tendency to overestimate his divinity and to treat his humanity with contempt. However, religiously conservative Spaniards tended to accept more readily that only God has access to knowledge which is universal, objective, and atemporal, and that any knowledge that man obtains, whether scientific or moral, is inherently particular, contingent, and transient.

Like Sánchez, Quevedo, in his fourth *Sueño*, 'El mundo por de dentro' (1627),<sup>15</sup> demonstrates an engagement with Sceptical ideas, but also the rejection of the quest for epistemological certainty in favour of attaining moral certainty. Quevedo opens the preface to the text by pointing out, in a comic tone, the difference between Academic and Pyrrhonian Scepticism: "es cosa averiguada, así lo siente Metrodoro Chío y otros muchos, que no se sabe nada y que todos son ignorantes. Y aun no se sabe de cierto: que, a saberse, ya se supiera algo; sospéchase" (161). Quevedo is here highlighting the Pyrrhonian belief that even asserting that man can know nothing is a statement of fact for which there is no proof. After referencing Francisco Sánchez, he then goes on to point out the vanity of the human quest for epistemological certainty

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<sup>15</sup> Although it was written in 1612. The episode containing the truth-revealing rope, which the following analysis will reference briefly, is only included in the amplified 1631 version of this *Sueño*.

through study: “hay algunos que no saben nada y estudian para saber, y éstos tienen buenos deseos y vano ejercicio: porque, al cabo, sólo les sirve el estudio de conocer cómo toda la verdad la quedan ignorando” (162). In line with Sánchez’s thoughts, Quevedo highlights that any type of study is always a circumstantial study of particulars, meaning that the more one learns, the more one realises that there is left to learn, since it is beyond man’s intellectual capabilities to induce general precepts which can be universally applied in different contexts.

Whilst the ‘Al lector’ of ‘El mundo por de dentro’ stresses man’s inability to gain certain knowledge and the futility of his endeavours to do so, the body of the text goes on to demonstrate Quevedo’s elevation of morality over the quest for epistemological certainty. In anticipation of the satirical structure of Gracián’s *El Criticón*, the young narrator of the text is repeatedly tricked by the surface appearance of various scenes which pass before him. An older man, who is revealed to be the allegorical figure of *Desengaño*, guides the young man and repeatedly stresses the importance of learning from experience, eventually using a truth-revealing rope to show the young man the truth below surface appearances. After witnessing the hypocrisy of a funeral procession, and then the hypocrisy of a widow mourning her dead husband, the young man, disillusioned by the disjunction between appearance and reality, begins to weep. *Desengaño* then remarks,

¿Ahora lloras, después de haber hecho ostentación vana de tus estudios y mostrádotte docto y teólogo, cuando era menester mostrarte prudente? [...] No es filósofo el que sabe dónde está el tesoro, sino el que trabaja y le saca. Ni aun ese lo es del todo, sino el que después de poseído usa bien dél (173).

*Desengaño* points out that study towards the aim of theoretical knowledge is misapplied and that, instead, man should apply his efforts to the cultivation of prudence. *Caído en cuenta* about this misapplication of his intellectual efforts, the young man therefore realises that his focus should not be on studying books towards the aim of certain knowledge, but on gathering experience from life from which he can learn to make moral decisions in order to demonstrate his virtue. Quevedo, representing most Spaniards of the time, therefore adopts a mitigated type of Christianised Scepticism, closer to the Academic Scepticism of Cicero, which stipulates that, while epistemological certainty about the existence and the nature of the world is not possible for man, moral certainty, towards the end of salvation, is possible and should be the focus of man’s efforts in the worldly realm.

While outlining the Spanish tendency to elevate morality over epistemology, Robbins does not include Gracián within the group of writers and thinkers who do so. He claims that the lack of references to religion in Gracián's works, and in *El Criticón* in particular, means that "there is no sense in which God acts as an epistemic guarantor" (2007: 206). This means that Gracián cannot exit the epistemological quagmire of uncertainty, and cannot take the step of moving past epistemology and onto morality, because the fundamental belief in the truths of religion are absent: how does one orient oneself in the world without the foundation of religion, without the certainty that the world simply *is* whether man can understand it or not? For Robbins, Gracián's world is foundation-less and the result is that he "is fundamentally pessimistic regarding both the human potential and the human desire for truth and moral knowledge" (2007: 202). Nevertheless, in contrast to Robbins' point of view, in the chapters to follow, this thesis will demonstrate that Gracián does, in fact, conform to the pattern that Robbins initially describes: like many of his seventeenth-century contemporaries, Gracián does accept the epistemological framework of Christianity, does set aside epistemological uncertainty, and does focus on the issues of morality and salvation after death.

#### *Neo-Stoicism: Morality and the Christian Paradox of Free Will*

Whilst Scepticism, and the introspective retreat from the world towards interior reason that it often entailed, emerged during the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, throughout the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth century the philosophy of Stoicism was also rediscovered. With its focus on morality and virtue, this philosophy was pleasing to Christian Spaniards of the time, who tended to turn away from the search for epistemological certainty and to direct their efforts towards morality. Stoicism was founded by Zeno of Citium in the third century BC and some of its most prominent exponents include Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius. It was rediscovered during the Renaissance by thinkers such as Erasmus, who edited Seneca's complete works, published in 1515, and Francisco Sánchez de las Brozas, who translated Epictetus' major work, the *Enchiridion*, into Spanish in 1600 (Ettinghausen 6 and 10, respectively). A key figure in the diffusion of Stoic ideas was the Flemish thinker Justus Lipsius. Lipsius' *De Constantia* was published in 1583 and it was an immediate success: between 1583 and 1705 there were thirty-two Latin

editions, and in 1616 it was translated into Spanish (Sellars 9). In this text, Lipsius aims to reconcile pagan Stoicism with Christianity and the Christianised version of Stoicism which subsequently emerged is referred to as Neo-Stoicism.

Stoic doctrine is composed of several key terms including, amongst others: *apatheia*, *ataraxia*, *autarkeia*, and *eudaimonia*. The first three of these terms refer to man's ability to maintain composure when under difficult circumstances and, as such, Stoic doctrine is often associated with a certain level of indifference and resignation towards the world. *Apatheia* signifies freedom from the passions; *ataraxia* refers to the state of tranquillity which results from having freed oneself from the passions; and *autarkeia* describes the state of self-sufficiency which the mind attains upon becoming completely independent from external influence and affairs. These concepts appear to align firmly with a worldview which focuses on introspective contemplation: *apatheia*, for example, is often translated into English as 'apathy', which is most often conceptualised negatively, as an impassivity which results from a lack of interest and engagement in external affairs. However, for the Stoics, these terms signify more accurately the state of equanimity which results precisely when faced with a situation which evokes a passionate reaction. As such, *apatheia*, *ataraxia*, and *autarkeia* can only come into being through confrontation with the external world: Stoic tranquillity only has meaning through contrast with the flux and variety of the worldly realm. The necessary coexistence of the interior and the exterior in Stoic doctrine is demonstrated by the term *eudaimonia*, which denotes the ultimate end of human life, and can be translated as 'happiness', 'virtue', or 'practical wisdom'. The Stoics therefore conflate practical, virtuous action in the worldly realm with the ultimate form of happiness, and the end towards which man should direct his efforts. In other words, for the Stoics, virtue itself, without the reward of immortality after death, is all that man can hope to achieve.

The focus on virtue, and on interaction with the external world, meant that Stoicism was a popular philosophy amongst Christians, who were able to assimilate easily the Stoic emphasis on morality into the broader metaphysical foundation of Christianity, in which morality and virtue were eventually rewarded by salvation and immortality after death. That the Stoic conception of virtue is similar to that of Christianity is manifest when, in letter ninety of his *Epistles* (65AD), Seneca states that,

Virtus non contingit animo nisi instituto et edocto et ad summum adsidua exercitatione perducto. Ad hoc quidem, sed sine hoc nascimur et in optimis quoque, antequam erudias, virtutis materia, non virtus est (428–30).<sup>16</sup>

As per Christian doctrine, and as highlighted by the likes of Pico della Mirandola in the fifteenth century, man possesses the potential to perfect himself through repetition and practice. As then pointed out by Castiglione in the sixteenth century, it is only through testing one's passions, and one's virtue, that one can learn to hone and to perfect them. Unlike Petrarch, Ficino, and Descartes, who turned away from the worldly realm in the hope of purifying man of that which was corporeal about him, Pico, Castiglione, and the philosophy of the Stoics, acknowledge and accept that man is not divine: man occupies the unique position of being human with an awareness of divinity and, as such, he must accept his humanity (the corporeal, the passions, and the senses). Nevertheless, with his awareness of divinity, he must also learn to navigate his humanity in such a way that it allows him to demonstrate his virtue.

From this concession to man's humanity comes the Stoic mantra that man must "live in accordance with his own nature", expressed by Seneca in letter forty-one of his *Epistles*: "Rationale enim animal est homo. Consummatur itaque bonum eius, si id inplevit, cui nascitur. Quid est autem, quod ab illo ratio haec exigit? Rem facillimam, secundum naturam suam vivere" (276–8).<sup>17</sup> Man is an animal, plagued by bestial instinct and passion; however, his unique nature also makes him a rational animal, self-reflexive and with an awareness of divinity. It is man's role to use this self-reflexivity in order to reflect upon his instincts and to keep his passions in check, ensuring that they never act to the detriment of his virtue. Stoicism therefore presented a philosophical school which was attractive to Christian Spaniards for the reason that it emphasised the type of rationality that led to moral perfection, rather than to epistemological certainty: practical reason over pure reason. The conceptualisation of reason as a faculty which works towards the end of morality, and which is contingent and subjective, as opposed to a conceptualisation of reason as a faculty which works towards the end of epistemological certainty, and which is

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<sup>16</sup> "Virtue is not vouchsafed to a soul unless that soul has been trained and taught, and by unremitting practice brought to perfection. For the attainment of this boon, but not in the possession of it, were we born; and even in the best of men, before you refine them by instruction, there is but the stuff of virtue, not virtue itself" (429–31).

<sup>17</sup> "For man is a reasoning animal. Therefore, man's highest good is attained, if he has fulfilled the good for which nature designed him at birth. And what is it which this reason demands of him? The easiest thing in the world, - to live in accordance with his own nature" (277–9).

atemporal and objective, is central to Gracián’s philosophy. He terms the former type of reason *ingenio* and this will be examined at length in the chapters to follow.

Despite several major divergences from Christian doctrine, Stoicism was generally pleasing to Christians and was easily assimilated, with some alterations, into a Christian outlook. However, one aspect of Stoic doctrine which Christians found difficult to integrate into their worldview was its apparent fatalism. Fatalism is the belief that all actions and events are predetermined and inevitable, and that human beings are powerless to alter them. The Stoic ideas of *apatheia*, *ataraxia*, and *autarkeia* can be interpreted as placing a great amount of stress on showing indifference towards hardship and on resigning oneself tolerantly to fate. The problem with fatalism, from a Christian perspective, is that, in order to cultivate virtue and to earn salvation, Christian man must choose to use his free will towards the end of moral conduct. A worldview which considers actions as predetermined negates the possibility of implementing free will, of cultivating virtue, and of earning salvation. Seneca addresses the problem of fatalism in letter sixteen of his *Epistles*, stating,

Dicet aliquis: “Quid mihi prodest philosophia, si fatum est? Quid prodest, si deus rector est? Quid prodest, si casus imperat? Nam et mutari certa non possunt et nihil praeparari potest adversus incerta; sed aut consilium meum occupavit deus decrevitque quid facerem, aut consilio meo nihil fortuna permittit” Quicquid est ex his, Lucili, vel si omnia haec sunt, philosophandum est: sive nos inexorabili lege fata constringunt, sive arbiter deus universi cuncta disposuit, sive casus res humanas sine ordine inpellit et iactat, philosophia nos tueri debet. Haec adhortabitur, ut deo libenter pareamus, ut fortunae contumaciter; haec docebit, ut deum sequaris, feras casum (104–6).<sup>18</sup>

Here we see Seneca defend the practice of Stoic philosophy in spite of the workings of fate: he argues that whether events are predetermined or not, it is impossible to prepare oneself fully, and that, since man can never be certain that events are the result of fate or not, the fortitude and equanimity provided by Stoic doctrine will help in either circumstance. This muted acceptance that all actions and events may be predetermined, and the denial of man’s free will that it entails, led to accusations of atheism against the Stoics. Denis Diderot in the *Encyclopédie*, for example,

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<sup>18</sup> “Perhaps someone will say: “How can philosophy help me, if Fate exists? Of what avail is philosophy, if God rules the universe? Of what avail is it, if Chance governs everything? For not only is it impossible to change things that are determined, but it is also impossible to plan beforehand against what is undetermined; either God has forestalled my plans, and decided what I am to do, or else Fortune gives no free play to my plans.” Whether the truth, Lucilius, lies in one or in all of these views, we must be philosophers; whether Fate binds us down by an inexorable law, or whether God as arbiter of the universe has arranged everything, or whether Chance drives and tosses human affairs without method, philosophy ought to be our defence. She will encourage us to obey God cheerfully, but Fortune defiantly; she will teach us to follow God and endure Chance” (105–7).

condemned Stoic doctrine, stating that “il n’est pas difficile de conclure de ces principes, que les stoïciens étoient matérialistes, fatalistes, et, à proprement parler, athées” (quoted in Blüher 13). In their assimilation of Stoic doctrine into Christianity, Neo-Stoics therefore found themselves obliged to address this issue.

In his *De Constantia*, written as a dialogue between two friends named Lipsius and Langius, Justus Lipsius sets about Christianising Stoic fatalism. In order to do so, he builds upon what is expressed in Seneca’s words above: the fact that fate is not necessarily the same as blind Fortune or whimsical chance and can, in fact, be the will of God. In other words, fate can be reconceptualised to mean Providence, the theological idea that God cares about his creation, protects it, has foresight about its future, and therefore predetermines actions and events which take place within it. Lipsius demonstrates his conversion of Stoic fatalism into Christian Providence when the Langius character of his dialogue that,

Est igitur in deo, Lipsi, fuit erit, pervigil illa, & perpes cura (fed cura tamen segura) qua res omnes inspicit, adit, cognoscit; & cognitas immota quadam & ignota nobis serie dirigit ac gubernat. Id autem est, quod Prouidentiam hîc voco (1584: 41).<sup>19</sup>

Despite Christianising Stoic fatalism in a way which is theologically satisfactory, Lipsius concedes that Christian Providence entails the same problem concerning man’s potential to implement his free will. The Lipsius character of the dialogue highlights the fact that there is little differentiation between Stoic fate and Christian Providence when he states, “non enim capio prorsus, quomodo Fatum hoc tuum ab illo Stöicorum disiungis. quod cum verbis & ianuâ, quod dicitur, benè exclusisti; re & postîco vidêris admittere” (1584: 64–5). Lipsius, via the voice of Langius, proceeds to explain how Providence can be reconciled with free will, explaining:

Postremò, voluntati vim illi intulisse visi violentam. abest hoc à nobis, qui & Fatum ponimus, & in gratiam tamen reducimus cum arbitrij libertate [...] Hic error omnis in ista re, hæc nubes. nemo scit se velle debere, quod vult Fatum. & dico, liberè velle. Deus enim ille qui res creauit, rebus vtitur, sine corruptione rerum [...] Arbores & fruges voluit crescere? crescunt sine vlla vi, per naturam. Homines deliberare, eligere? deliberant sine vlla vi & eligunt, per voluntatem. Et tamen hoc ipsum quod electuri fuerunt, vidit ipse ab æterno: sed vidit, non coëgit; sciuit, non sanxit; prædixit, non præscripsit. Quid titubant hîc nostri Curiones? Miselli! (1584: 65–6).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “There is in God a watchful and continual care, yet without burden, whereby he beholds, searches, and knows all things; and knowing them, disposes and orders the same by an immutable course to us unknown. And this is it, which I here call Providence” (2006: 55).

<sup>20</sup> “[Stoic fate] seemed to intrude a violent force upon our will. This is far from us, who do both allow fate or destiny, and also join hands with liberty or freedom of will [...] Herein is all the error and

Lipsius presents a seemingly paradoxical conceptualisation of the way in which Providence and free will complement each other, in which man should will that which Destiny wills, and do so willingly. Whilst this contradiction is such that it causes confusion even amongst priests, it is, however, a religiously orthodox viewpoint, sanctioned and codified by Saint Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica*. The fatalism of Stoic philosophy, the predetermination of which seems to negate the possibility of cultivating virtue, therefore reflects the contradiction inherent in Christianity itself which asserts that Providence and free will coexist. Neo-Stoics, such as Lipsius, Christianised Stoic fate by rebranding it as Christian Providence but, as Langius points out in Lipsius' dialogue, the differentiation between the two is often obscure.

Quevedo admired Lipsius' assimilation of Stoic ideas and began a correspondence with him in 1604, while he was still a student (Ettinghausen 19). Despite Quevedo's evident affinity and admiration for Neo-Stoicism, Blüher argues that his interest in it, and in the issue of morality generally, wanes as his literary career progresses, replaced by a pessimistic focus on death and on Christian metaphysics. For example, he describes how Quevedo becomes increasingly focused on "el anhelo cristiano-platónico por la otra vida", and how his interest in Neo-Stoicism "queda cada vez más desplazado por el pensamiento cristiano" (454 and 460, respectively). According to Blüher, this leads to a philosophical Pessimism in Quevedo's later works, characterised by an emphasis on death as the only escape from a world in which, thanks to the rise of Scepticism, nothing can be known for certain. However, Ettinghausen takes an alternative point of view, arguing that Quevedo's Neo-Stoicism and his focus on theology are not at all mutually exclusive and are, in fact, constants throughout his literary career (123): in Neo-Stoic fashion, Quevedo implements the Stoic focus on virtue and morality towards the end of attaining Christian salvation, for the reason that Christian metaphysics, and the Christian conceptualisation of other-worldly life after death, are intertwined with

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ignorance in this matter, no man considers how he ought to will that which destiny wills. And I say freely to will it. For God that created all things uses the same without any corruption of them...He wishes that trees and corn should grow; so they do, without force, of their free will. And yet whatsoever they were in mind to make choice of, God foresaw from all eternity. He foresaw it, I say, not forced it; he knew it, but constrained not; he foretold it, but not prescribed it. Why do our curious priests stagger or stumble here? O simple creatures!" (2006: 69–70).

moral conduct carried out in the worldly realm. The rediscovery of Stoic ideas therefore provided Christians of the time with a system of morality which complemented their pre-existing focus on this branch of philosophy. Furthermore, since Christian Spaniards tended to set aside the problem of epistemological uncertainty in favour of attaining moral certainty, which would subsequently be rewarded with salvation and assimilation into the realm of the divine after death, their focus on death did not imply a pessimistic outlook: rather, death was reconceptualised as a liberation from the uncertainty of the worldly realm, and the beginning of a life of total clarity. This optimistic view of death, infused with Christian theology, is held by most seemingly pessimistic writers of seventeenth-century Spain, including Gracián.

The coexistence of Stoic morality and Christian metaphysics is demonstrated in Quevedo's *La cuna y la sepultura* (1634). In chapter four of this text, Quevedo first establishes the Sceptical belief that we can know nothing, and that man's presumption of knowledge is misplaced, stating, for example, that "la mayor hipocresía y más dañosa y sin fundamento es la de la sabiduría" (111). He then goes on to express the idea that only God possesses true knowledge and that only upon death can man hope to access this insight too:

No le es concedida al hombre [la sabiduría], porque la sabiduría verdadera está en la verdad, y la verdad es una sola, y esa verdad una es Dios solo, que por eso la llaman Dios verdadero; y fuera dÉl todo es opinión, y los más cuerdos sospechan. Así, debes tener por cierto que la primera lección que lee la sabiduría al hombre es en el día de su muerte; y que, cuando muere, empieza a aprender (112–3).

Quevedo conflates epistemological Truth, "la verdad", with God himself and, in doing so, highlights the futility of trying to attain it during life: man is human with an awareness of God, but he does not have the intellectual capacity to conceptualise fully and to understand the divine. Unification with God, and with Truth, only comes after death, imbuing death with an epistemological Optimism which is unavailable to man in the worldly realm.

Chapter five of the same text then demonstrates Quevedo's advocacy of a Stoic attitude towards hardship, as well as his Neo-Stoic assimilation of this Stoic attitude into a worldview which aligns with Christian orthodoxy. The chapter closes with three prayers, the first of which is entitled, "Modo de resignarse en la voluntad de Dios nuestro señor" (132), implying the belief that adversity is the will of God, in

the form of Providence, and is therefore necessary for man to accept willingly and dispassionately, in Stoic fashion. Within this prayer, Quevedo writes:

Dame lo que no sabes dar; quítame lo que no sé poseer. Si para asegurar las insolencias de mi maldad conviene ninguna hacienda, poca salud, corta vida, vengan de tu mano por tu misericordia y pobreza, la enfermedad y la muerte (133).

Adversities such as poverty, illness, and death are here described as a consequence of “las insolencias de mi maldad”, recalling the Christian concept of Original Sin, in which it is often considered that man’s innate goodness was compromised by the misguided implementation of his free will, and his propensity towards immorality was established. Quevedo continues his prayer: “Ilévame a que obre tu voluntad, que el premio se debe a las buenas obras, si se hacen; mas tu gracia, que no se debe, procede para que se pueda hacer” (132), expressing the idea that “el premio” (salvation) is the result of “buenas obras” (moral conduct) and that only through the benevolent “gracia” (Grace) of God is man granted the chance to carry out this moral conduct and to earn salvation as a result. Quevedo is here justifying the existence of hardship, conceptualising it positively as an opportunity, granted by God through the theological concept of Grace, for man to test and to hone his virtue and moral status. In this prayer, whilst advocating a Stoic attitude of equanimity when faced with adversity, Quevedo also fuses his predilection for Stoicism with a worldview which is theologically orthodox, incorporating the Christian concepts of Providence, Original Sin, free will, virtue leading to salvation, and Grace.

In spite of Quevedo’s positive conceptualisation of death which, in line with Christian orthodoxy, considers it as a liberation which allows man to attain divinity, Blüher fails to see the Optimism inherent in this viewpoint. Instead, he focuses upon the corollary of this other-worldly Optimism, which is: worldly Pessimism. In this sense, Spanish writers of the seventeenth century, such as Quevedo and Gracián, share a certain interpretative ambiguity: both optimistic and pessimistic depending upon whether the plane of interpretation is worldly or other-worldly, human or divine. These writers found in Stoic philosophy a reflection of this ambivalence, and of the paradox which characterises Christianity itself, between the existence of Providence and the potential for man to use his free will. Like the Neo-Stoics, Gracián grapples with this paradox throughout his literary career, exploring the extent of the freedom of free will, and man’s individual obligation to cultivate his moral status, via several different themes: through the idea of noble birth being a prerequisite for salvation

(see chapter three), through the idea of Fortune and luck deciding one's fate (see chapters three and five), through the idea of repeatedly challenging and activating one's virtue throughout life (see chapters three and five), and through the idea of honing one's ability to make moral decisions through the perfection of prudence (see chapter five). Like Lipsius and Quevedo, Gracián Christianises Stoicism, resulting in a Neo-Stoic worldview which proposes an optimistic model of morality, but which also retains the paradox between Optimism and Pessimism which characterises Christianity.

*The Jesuits: Prudence as Worldly Wisdom or Other-Worldly Virtue*

Often overlooked in interpretations of Gracián's works is the fact that he was a Jesuit priest, meaning that the theology and ideology of Catholicism generally, and of the Jesuits in particular, inevitably pervade his thinking. Many interpreters, including in Gracián's own time, have considered him a subversive figure who reacts against Jesuit doctrine, rather than being an exponent of it. This is evidenced, for example, by the *Crítica de reflexión* which appeared in 1658, the year of Gracián's death, and which accuses him of forgetting his religious vocation and of having an excessively secular focus. The interpretation of Gracián's works as excessively worldly, and the associated claim that they reject morality in favour of worldly success, has prevailed amongst modern critics too (Robbins 2019: 131). However, as Robbins points out, the Jesuits themselves were often criticised for placing too much stress on worldly concerns, both by their critics and by their own members, meaning that Gracián's worldliness is, in fact, characteristic of his Order (2019: 131). As such, "the problem of Gracián is often, in large part, the problem of how the Jesuits, specifically their behaviour and outlook, were perceived" (Robbins 2019: 131).

The *Compañía de Jesús* was officially founded in 1540 by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, with the approval of Pope Paul III. Ignatius was a military man whose inspiration for founding the Jesuit Order occurred during his recovery from a wound which he sustained during the Battle of Pamplona in 1521. Therefore, from its very inception, the *Compañía* was a religious Order built upon civic duty and social responsibility, and not only upon the Christian aim of attaining salvation in an other-worldly realm after death. The opening lines of the Order's founding document, for example, designate its members as 'soldiers of God', and one of its founding

principles is obedience to the Pope in any apostolic, missionary voyage that he may assign. The Jesuits' worldly focus is further manifest through its system of education: Jesuit schools quickly populated Europe, offering a curriculum, codified in 1599 as the 'Ratio Studiorum', which combined Renaissance, humanistic studies with the Aristotelian and Thomistic Scholasticism which had moulded Christianity since the Middle Ages (Batllori 107–9). This comprehensive curriculum was attractive not only to those seeking an education which was spiritually edifying; through pedagogical practices such as that of *disputatio*, it also provided thorough training to those seeking to enter public life, as lawyers or administrative officials. Despite the undeniable worldliness at the core of the *Compañía de Jesús*, the Order also places a great amount of stress on introspective contemplation: between 1522 and 1524, Saint Ignatius de Loyola composed the *Ejercicios espirituales*, a course of meditations and prayers intended to be carried out intensively during one month, compulsory for all wishing to enter the Order, but also accessible to laypeople. Much like Pico's idea of Cherubic contemplation, the aim of these exercises is to enable the participant to contemplate the divine, to come to an awareness of God's will, and to subsequently implement this awareness in the worldly realm. The Jesuits, like the Neo-Platonists, therefore intertwine worldliness and other-worldliness, and introspective contemplation and practical action.

The similarity between the thinking of the *Compañía de Jesús* and Neo-Platonism is manifest in the works of the Jesuit Padre Juan Eusebio Nieremberg, particularly in his *De la diferencia entre lo temporal y lo eterno* (1640). In this text, he explains the way in which the temporal (the worldly) and the eternal (the other-worldly) interact with each other. For Nieremberg, the temporal, despite being inherently inferior to the eternal, is imbued with meaning due to the access to the eternal which it can provide. He writes,

Despierten, y abran los mortales ojos, y conozcan la diferencia que hay entre lo temporal y lo eterno, para que den a cada cosa su estimación debida, despreciando todo lo que el tiempo acaba y estimando todo lo que la eternidad conserva, a la cual deben buscar en el tiempo de esta vida, y por las mismas cosas temporales granjear las eternas, lo cual no podrán conseguir sin el conocimiento de unas y de otras, para que, puesta la mira en lo eterno, como de más estima, conserven lo temporal, aunque por sí no tenga alguna (4).

A clear distinction is here drawn between the different values that we should assign to the temporal and the eternal, indicated when Nieremberg states that we should grant each "su estimación debida". Despite the scorn with which we should treat "todo lo

que el tiempo acaba”, the temporal is imbued with value due to its ability to reveal the eternal: Nieremberg writes that we should look for the eternal “en el tiempo de esta vida y por las mismas cosas temporales granjear las eternas”. Eternity and temporality therefore complement each other, the latter granting access to the former, and the former granting “estima” to the latter, even if “por sí no tenga alguna”. As such, Nieremberg, representing the Jesuit attitude in general, advocates an other-worldly focus on the divine above all, whilst also intertwining it with a tolerance for the worldly realm of human affairs, every aspect of which can be used as a channel towards access to God. As Fumaroli explains, the *Compañía de Jesús* viewed the world as “una jerarquización de principio entre los dos órdenes, el natural y el sobrenatural, el histórico y el transhistórico, el civil y el eclesiástico, que no debilitó ni al uno ni al otro, sino muy al contrario, exaltó al uno por medio del otro” (52). The Jesuits therefore espouse a worldview which incorporates as complementary components both the worldly and the other-worldly, and the human and the divine, whilst still maintaining, in religiously orthodox fashion, the essential superiority of the latter aspect of these dualities.

Misapprehension when it comes to interpreting Jesuit writers, such as Gracián, tends to arise when the complementarity between the human and the divine is forgotten. In these interpretations, worldliness is viewed in purely secular terms and not as something which is intrinsically intertwined with other-worldliness. In other words, worldly success is seen as an end in itself, detached from the issue of morality which links worldly conduct to other-worldly salvation. Such interpretations often convert the Christian conceptualisation of virtue into Machiavellian *virtù* (Ayala Martínez 2004: 107), which Machiavelli expounds in chapter eighteen of *Il Principe* (1513): in this chapter, entitled ‘In che modo i principi debbano mantenere la fede’, he describes “che uno principe, e massime uno principe nuovo, non può osservare tutte quelle cose per le quali li uomini sono tenuti buoni” (1412), justified for the reason that “se li uomini fussino tutti buoni, questo precetto non sarebbe buono; ma perché sono tristi, e non la osservarebano a te, tu etiam non l’hai ad osservare a loro” (1412). Due to a sense of morality not being ubiquitous in all people, Machiavelli’s prince is encouraged to be flexible with his own morality, to uphold it when possible, but not to hesitate in breaching it when necessary. Machiavelli therefore presents a conceptualisation of *virtù* in which immoral conduct by a prince is acceptable “per mantenere lo stato” (1412), and in which permission is explicitly granted to act

“contro alla fede, contro alla carità, contro alla umanità, contro alla religione” (1412). Machiavellian *virtù* detaches worldly success from morality and, thus, from the Christian conceptualisation of virtue and salvation, creating an insuperable rupture between worldliness and other-worldliness. The danger of the Jesuits’ characteristic focus on worldly affairs is that its intertwining with a concern for the other-worldly is forgotten, that worldly success is seen as an end in itself, and that Christian morality is seen as subordinated to secular, political interests, in Machiavellian fashion. The tendency for critics to adopt this approach when interpreting Gracián’s works is examined in chapter three of this thesis.

Machiavelli’s concept of *virtù* represents a distorted version of Christian virtue, in which a consciously immoral course of action is sanctioned. This means that the process of prudence, which differentiates between a moral and an immoral choice, is also distorted in Machiavelli’s scheme. He defines prudence in *Il Principe* as consisting “in sapere conoscere le qualità delli inconvenienti, e pigliare il men tristo per buono” (XXI, 1803), demonstrating his idea of prudence as a tool which, rather than being directed uncompromisingly towards the end of goodness and virtue, and individual salvation, is instead directed towards the morally ambiguous end of lesser evil, and collective societal success. That the Jesuits’ worldliness is intrinsically intertwined with morality and other-worldly salvation, and that it cannot be conflated with a Machiavellian notion of worldly success, is evidenced through their conflicting conceptualisation of prudence, which is infused, as their ‘Ratio Studiorum’ would suggest, with Ciceronian, Aristotelian, and Thomistic philosophy.

Cicero, in book two of his *De Inventione*, defines virtue: “nam virtus est animi habitus naturae modo atque rationi consentaneus”,<sup>21</sup> and highlights that “habet igitur partes quattuor: prudentiam, iustitiam, fortitudinem, temperantiam” (326).<sup>22</sup> Prudence is therefore a form of virtue for Cicero. However, unlike Christian thinkers, Cicero defines virtue, in a pagan and materialistic way, as that which is in keeping with “the order of nature”, without explicitly connecting it to the idea of goodness.<sup>23</sup> He goes on to outline the four components of virtue in turn, writing specifically on prudence that,

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<sup>21</sup> “Virtue may be defined as a habit of mind in harmony with reason and the order of nature” (327).

<sup>22</sup> “It has four parts: wisdom, justice, courage, temperance” (327).

<sup>23</sup> This pagan materialism is also typical of Stoic thinking, evident when Seneca writes in his *Epistles* that “nempe propositum nostrum est secundum naturam vivere” (22) / “Our motto, as you know, is ‘Live according to Nature’” (23).

Prudentia est rerum bonarum et malarum neutrarumque scientia. Partes eius: memoria, intelligentia, providentia. Memoria est per quam animus repetit illa quae fuerunt; intelligentia, per quam ea perspicit quae sunt; providentia, per quam futurum aliquid videtur ante quam factum est (326).<sup>24</sup>

Here Cicero outlines the way in which prudence incorporates three temporal planes, looking backwards to past experience, and projecting forwards towards potential outcomes, in order to actualise virtue in the present circumstances. However, what is noteworthy about Cicero's conceptualisation of prudence is that, just as he defines virtue as an "animi habitus", "prudentia" too is simply "rerum bonarum et malarum neutrarumque scientia". In other words, Cicero conceptualises prudence as a cognitive act, as an intellectual awareness of good and bad which can be accomplished, in contemplative fashion, purely within man's interiority. The problem of this conceptualisation of prudence, from a Christian point of view, is that theoretical knowledge of what is good does not preclude the possibility of practical action which is consciously contrary to this knowledge. Ciceronian prudence can therefore be seen as "an intellectual rather than a moral virtue" (Kahn 42).

On the other hand, Aristotle, in the *Rhetoric*, writes, in relation to virtue that: "ἀρετὴ δ' ἐστὶ μὲν δύναμις, ὡς δοκεῖ, ποριστικὴ ἀγαθῶν καὶ φυλακτικὴ, καὶ δύναμις εὐεργετικὴ πολλῶν καὶ μεγάλων, καὶ πάντων περὶ πάντα" (88),<sup>25</sup> and lists the components of virtue as "δικαιοσύνη, ἀνδρεία, σωφροσύνη, μεγαλοπρέπεια, μεγαλοψυχία, ἐλευθεριότης, πραότης, φρόνησις, σοφία" (88).<sup>26</sup> This differs from Cicero in two ways: firstly, Aristotle explicitly connects virtue to goodness and, secondly, he differentiates between the virtues of practical (φρόνησις) and speculative (σοφία) wisdom. In book six of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle then highlights that contemplative, theoretical knowledge of unchanging universals is not sufficient for the realisation of prudence and that, in order for prudence to be realised, contemplative deliberation must be combined with an analysis of exterior circumstances:

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<sup>24</sup> "Wisdom is the knowledge of what is good, what is bad and what is neither good nor bad. Its parts are memory, intelligence, and foresight. Memory is the faculty by which the mind recalls what has happened. Intelligence is the faculty by which it ascertains what is. Foresight is the faculty by which it is seen that something is going to occur before it occurs" (327).

<sup>25</sup> "Virtue, it would seem, is a faculty of providing and preserving good things, a faculty productive of many and great benefits, in fact, of all things in all cases" (89).

<sup>26</sup> "Justice, courage, self-control, magnificence, magnanimity, liberality, gentleness, practical and speculative wisdom" (89).

ἡ δὲ φρόνησις περὶ τὰ ἀνθρώπινα, καὶ περὶ ὧν ἔστι βουλευσασθαι. τοῦ γὰρ φρονίμου μάλιστα τοῦτ' ἔργον εἶναι φαμεν, τὸ εὖ βουλευέσθαι· βουλευέται δ' οὐθεὶς περὶ τῶν ἀδυνάτων ἄλλως ἔχειν, οὐδ' ὅσων μὴ τέλος τί ἐστι, καὶ τοῦτο πρακτὸν ἀγαθόν· ὁ δ' ἀπλῶς εὐβουλος ὁ τοῦ ἄριστου ἀνθρώπου τῶν πρακτῶν στοχαστικὸς κατὰ τὸν λογισμὸν (344).<sup>27</sup>

For Aristotle, prudence is connected to worldly affairs, meaning that it necessarily extends beyond man's interiority into the earthly realm. Whilst he states that intellectual deliberation is an important characteristic of the prudent man, Aristotle also stresses that, in the process of carrying out prudence, this deliberation must be applied to temporal, particular things. In other words, for Aristotle, prudential deliberation can only be of things which have the potential to be changed as an outcome of this deliberation, meaning that abstract and theoretical contemplation alone cannot lead to prudence. Aristotelian prudence therefore unites speculative and practical wisdom by incorporating two steps, both of which are necessary for the actualisation of prudence and of virtue: deliberation followed by action.<sup>28</sup>

Aquinas, whose Scholasticism infused Jesuit thought, defines virtue in the *Summa Theologica* stating, “virtus est quae bonum facit habentem et opus eius bonum reddit” (II.II, Q. 47, Art. 4),<sup>29</sup> outlines four virtues which manifest human goodness (prudence, justice, temperance, courage), and names these the cardinal virtues (II.I, Q. 62, Art. 2). Like Cicero and Aristotle, Aquinas therefore classifies prudence as a virtue, and like Aristotle, he connects virtue to goodness, in typically Christian fashion. In part II-II (Q. 47, Arts. 2–3), Aquinas then addresses the two conflicting conceptualisations of prudence, represented by the philosophy of Cicero and Aristotle respectively: prudence as theoretical wisdom, or as practical action. He does so by discussing whether prudence belongs to practical reason or also to speculative reason (II.II, Q. 47, Art. 2). Aquinas considers both sides of this question before concluding, based upon Aristotle's arguments, that “unde manifestum est quod prudentia non consistit nisi in ratione practica”.<sup>30</sup> Despite prudence representing a

<sup>27</sup> “Prudence on the other hand is concerned with the affairs of men, and with things that can be the object of deliberation. For we say that to deliberate well is the most characteristic function of the prudent man; but no one deliberates about things that cannot vary nor yet about variable things that are not a means to some end, and that end a good attainable by action; and a good deliberator in general is a man who can arrive by calculation at the best of the goods attainable by man.” (345).

<sup>28</sup> It is worth noting that Cicero's conceptualisation of prudence as an “animi habitus”, a habit of mind, closely aligns with the Aristotelian concept of *hexis*, often translated as ‘habitus’ in medieval and early modern Europe. Aristotelian *hexis* stipulates that certain dispositions or ways of being can be acquired through training and practice. The implication here, relevant for the argument of this thesis, is that the mindset that leads to the realisation of prudence, either Ciceronian or Aristotelian, can be consciously practised and perfected, until it becomes an unconscious disposition or habit.

<sup>29</sup> “Virtue is that which makes its possessor good, and his work good likewise”.

<sup>30</sup> “Hence it is evident that prudence resides only in the practical reason”.

kind of wisdom, and despite the fact that “sapientia principaliter consistit in contemplatione”,<sup>31</sup> the kind of wisdom represented by prudence is wisdom in practical affairs, “non autem sapientia simpliciter”.<sup>32</sup> Aquinas explains that

Manifestum est quod prudentia est sapientia in rebus humanis, non autem sapientia simpliciter, quia non est circa causam altissimam simpliciter; est enim circa bonum humanum, homo autem non est optimum eorum quae sunt. Et ideo signanter dicitur quod prudentia est sapientia viro, non autem sapientia simpliciter.<sup>33</sup>

Absolute wisdom equates to the highest form of wisdom imaginable which is: divine insight, epistemological certainty, and atemporal knowledge of universals, none of which are accessible to man. Human wisdom, on the other hand, exists in relation to worldly affairs, and lies within the remit of human good and morality. Human wisdom, and prudence, project outwards, towards action in the worldly realm, whilst speculative reason concerns itself with other-worldly contemplation and is confined to introspective theorisation. Aquinas therefore concludes in this article that prudence, with its focus on exteriority, virtue, morality, human good, and action, must belong to the remit of practical reason.

In the following article, Aquinas considers whether prudence takes cognizance of singulars (II.II, Q. 47, Art. 3), and takes as his starting point Aristotle’s conceptualisation of prudence as “recta ratio agibilium” (II. Q. 47, Art. 2).<sup>34</sup> In other words, Aquinas here addresses Aristotle’s bipartite division of prudence into deliberation followed by action, and the way in which the rational and the practical coexist within this scheme. As prudence incorporates a rational, intellectual process, Aquinas briefly posits the idea that it “non est singularium”,<sup>35</sup> because reason always deals with universals. However, he quickly argues against this viewpoint by explaining that prudence is not only a rational, intellectual process, but is also an active, practical one, and that practical action can only be applied in relation to the singularity of particular circumstances. As a result, he concludes that “et ideo necesse est quod prudens et cognoscat universalia principia rationis, et cognoscat singularia,

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<sup>31</sup> “Wisdom consists chiefly in contemplation”.

<sup>32</sup> “Is not wisdom absolutely”.

<sup>33</sup> “Is clear that prudence is wisdom about human affairs: but not wisdom absolutely, because it is not about the absolutely highest cause, for it is about human good, and this is not the best thing of all. And so it is stated significantly that ‘prudence is wisdom for man’, but not wisdom absolutely”.

<sup>34</sup> “Right reason applied to action”.

<sup>35</sup> “Does not take cognizance of singulars”.

circa quae sunt operationes”.<sup>36</sup> Thomistic prudence, building upon and Christianising the foundation of Aristotelian prudence, therefore reconciles reason and action, the theoretical and the practical, and the universal and the particular. It does so by rejecting Cicero’s conceptualisation of prudence as purely speculative and theoretical, and by incorporating Aristotle’s delineation of prudence into two stages: deliberation followed by action.

Christianising Aristotelian prudence, in order to combat the disjunction between theory and practice which can occur when man consciously takes action which is immoral, in Machiavellian fashion, Aquinas specifies in II.II, Q. 47, Art. 8 that the action which follows deliberation in the process of prudence must be informed by and conform to the result of this deliberation. In other words, in perceiving the moral course of action in a particular circumstance, virtue and prudence are only actualised when man carries out this moral course of action, since “imprudenter enim est qui volens peccat”.<sup>37</sup> Thomistic prudence, assimilating and Christianising Aristotelian prudence, connects in a causal link prudence, virtue, and morality and, through fusing this with the metaphysical framework of Christianity, fuses prudence with salvation. As Fumaroli writes, Christianised prudence created a “Simetría entre el arte de la prudencia en el mundo temporal y el arte de alcanzar la salvación en el mundo espiritual” (8). In other words, prudence is a prerequisite for virtue which, in turn, is a prerequisite for salvation.

Thomistic prudence therefore reconciles worldliness and other-worldliness in a way which was attractive for the Jesuits, whose Order was founded with the reconciliation between the human and the divine at its core. The Aristotelian and Thomistic conceptualisations of virtue and prudence pervade the works of Gracián. For example, in 2.X of *El Criticón* Virtelia (Virtue) presents her four most important ministers to Critilo and Andrenio, who personify the four cardinal virtues outlined by Aquinas (Pelegrín 130). The delineation of prudence into the steps of deliberation and action also influences Gracián’s works: for example, he uses the same delineation to describe the process of *ingenio* in the *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* (discussed in chapter four), and eventually explores the idea that *ingenio* itself is a form of prudence, which can be perfected to the extent that the delay between deliberation and action becomes

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<sup>36</sup> “It is necessary for the prudent man to know both the universal principles of reason, and the singulars about which actions are concerned”.

<sup>37</sup> “It is more imprudent to sin voluntarily”.

negligible, novelised in 3.IX of *El Criticón* (see chapter five). The Aristotelian and Thomistic conceptualisation of prudence also carries ontological ramifications which are manifest in Gracián's works (see chapters four, five, and six): prudence and virtue cannot consist solely in contemplative theorisation, and must be actualised through action in the world. Likewise, man himself cannot exist in a contemplative state; he is an inherently bodily being who only exists through interaction with the world. Unlike Descartes, who severs man's intellect from his corporeality, his being from the world, Gracián, and the Jesuits in general, embrace and grant dignity to this corporeality, as the channel via which access to the divine can be granted.

Through their dual focus on worldliness and other-worldliness, Gracián and the Jesuits therefore reject the introspection advocated by figures such as Petrarch, Ficino, and Descartes, realising that Christian man “no puede limitarse de ahora en adelante a la especulación y a la contemplación del cielo, volviéndose enteramente hacia Dios y apartándose de las vanidades del mundo de los hombres” (Fumaroli 33–4). Instead, they embrace man's essential humanity, and learn to work with it in a way which, admittedly, “easily looks calculating, worldly, and thus secular” (Robbins 2019: 135). However, the Jesuits' worldliness, and potential secularity, is countered by the fact that they always hold the glory of divinity in higher esteem, granting the worldly realm value only insofar as it enables man to cultivate his virtue in order to earn access to the divine after death.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has outlined the primary intellectual currents of thought which fed into and influenced Gracián's works, namely Neo-Platonism, Scepticism, Neo-Stoicism, and Jesuit doctrine. In their different ways, these currents respond to the duality between the divine and the human which tends to characterise philosophical thinking of all ages. The Neo-Platonists, such as Pico, Pomponazzi, and Castiglione reconcile this duality by outlining an optimistic worldview in which the universal can be accessed via the particular. The Sceptics, such as Descartes, ruptured this reconciliation by asserting that knowledge, and access to universality, was impossible for man. This rupture was overcome by Christian Spaniards, such as Sánchez and Quevedo, through their focus on contingent truth and moral certainty over objective Truth and epistemological certainty. This allowed them to optimistically construct a

system of morality on top of the foundation of Christian metaphysics, the reality of which was accepted based upon faith alone. Neo-Stoicism, due to its focus on morality and virtue, and due to its incorporation of the Christian paradox concerning the coexistence of Providence and free will, subsequently served Christian thinkers, such as Quevedo, with a theologically satisfactory guide for conduct in the quest for moral certainty, leading to the Christianised, Neo-Stoic movement. Finally, Jesuit thinkers, such as Ignatius and Nieremberg, manifest the Spanish focus on virtue and morality via an Aristotelian and Thomistic conceptualisation of prudence, which reconciles worldliness with other-worldliness through causally connecting prudence and virtue in the worldly realm with salvation after death.

Various dualities have been used throughout this chapter to refer to the philosophical cleavage between the divine and the human, including: transcendence and immanence; objectivity and subjectivity; interiority and exteriority; metaphysics and ethics; contemplation and action; other-worldliness and worldliness; and the universal and the particular. As a philosophical writer, these dualities inform Gracián's works too, particularly when conceptualised, in typically Baroque fashion, as pertaining to the realms of *ser* and *parecer* respectively. In addition to these dualities, several key words, phrases, and concepts have also emerged in this chapter, which will recur throughout the analysis of Gracián's works to follow, including: virtue, prudence, practical wisdom, worldly happiness, Happiness, Providence, free will, Grace, salvation, immortality, and Fortune.

Through these dualities and key words, we can appreciate that Gracián was living in a philosophically, and theologically, complex era. Whilst this chapter offers an analysis which, at times, neatly synthesises this complexity into a narrative which begins, via the Neo-Platonists, and concludes, via the Jesuits, with the championing of humanity and of man's dignity, it is not the case that the philosophical viewpoint of any one thinker, not least Gracián, consistently demonstrates this Optimism. Influenced by a plethora of philosophical and theological sources, Gracián grapples with the dualities outlined in this chapter, particularly in his early treatises, at times elevating humanity, and at other times scorning it completely in favour of divinity. Only in *El Criticón* does his thinking cohere into a comprehensive worldview in which the aesthetic and epistemological functions of *ingenio* coalesce with a concern for morality, and the associated ideas of virtue and prudence, as the rest of this thesis will examine.

### Chapter Three: The Treatises

Gracián's treatises include *El Héroe*, published in 1637; *El Político*, published in 1640; *El Discreto*, published in 1646; and the *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*, published in 1647. These texts share similarities in subject matter, style, and, to a certain extent, form, which justify their being analysed together. The *Arte de ingenio, tratado de la agudeza* (published in 1642 and then reworked as the *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*, published in 1648), although written during the same period, diverges from the treatises in subject matter, and so is studied separately in the following chapter.

Gracián's treatises are rarely dealt with as individual bodies of work. Instead, as Laplana and Moraleja Juárez have pointed out, they are often treated collectively, with the *Oráculo* considered to incorporate the ideas of all previous texts and to represent the culmination of Gracián's thought up until that point (62 and 1999: 11, respectively). The ensuing analysis will challenge this generalisation of the treatises by examining each in turn and, in doing so, will shed light upon the development of Gracián's ideas during the first decade of his literary career. More often than not, this development can be glimpsed during Gracián's engagement with the dualities which characterised his time, outlined in the previous chapter: should man participate enthusiastically and actively in the world, or should he turn inwards for spiritual edification whilst awaiting patiently the next life? Can value be found in the particular world of circumstance, or should we scorn it in favour of something more universal and divine? These questions are addressed in the treatises through engagement with three primary debates: does Gracián recommend a Machiavellian approach to the world, or does he stress the necessity of cultivating Christian virtue? Does he recommend that man be God-like and detached from the world, or does he encourage engagement with one's surroundings and with others? And does Gracián view good Fortune and noble birth as a prerequisite for success, or does he believe that hard work and the implementation of prudence can improve man's fate? These are the questions which lie below the surface of the treatises and, when reading them, it soon becomes evident that Gracián was grappling with both sides of each dichotomy, at times seemingly supporting one side, only to support the other a few pages later. This helps to explain both his contradictory nature, and why making any statements about his 'doctrine', as a fixed and definitive school of thought, is misguided, especially at this early stage.

Nevertheless, there is a development between *El Héroe* and the *Oráculo* and it is key to enabling us to understand the *Agudeza* and *El Criticón*. This chapter will show that the treatises share certain characteristics: for example, nearly all elevate the intellectual faculty of *ingenio*, showing the clarity with which Gracián conceived the importance of this faculty, even from the beginning of his literary career, and this is noteworthy given the important role that *ingenio* will go on to play in the *Agudeza* and *El Criticón*. In addition, all the treatises portray a somewhat ambivalent and fluctuating attitude towards the role of Fortune in man's life, as pointed out repeatedly but briefly by Coster (88, 105, 188, 279). However, within the treatises a crucial development in Gracián's thought emerges: his theory of *ingenio* comes to intersect with his ideas on Fortune to produce a system of morality centred on prudence and virtue. This means that the idea of man as a helpless victim of fate is replaced by the more Christian idea that man is obliged to curate his own salvation by consistently making virtuous choices.

By tracking this development in Gracián's thought this chapter will challenge two common misunderstandings of the treatises. The first is that they follow in the footsteps of Machiavelli's *Il Principe* by advocating a cunning and ruthless approach to success, in which the end always justifies the means (see, for example, Cantarino 32–4; Ayala 37; or Spadaccini and Talens 13). Despite it being widely acknowledged that Gracián, under the influence of Tacitus, writes a moralised politics *a lo cristiano* in his treatises (Correa Calderón 153, 269; González Roldán 251; Moraleja Juárez 1999: 49), critics' tendency to stress the hostility of the world, the malice of others, and man's need to be selfish along the path to success nevertheless prevails. This is exemplified by the title that Robbins gives to his abridged version of the *Oráculo*, published in 2015: *How to Use your Enemies*. The popularity of this type of interpretation can be easily explained by the simple fact that trying to navigate a seemingly hostile world is something to which many people still relate today (Cuartero 98). The second misunderstanding that this chapter will challenge, somewhat intertwined with his apparent Machiavellianism, is the assumption that Gracián encourages a retreat into the self and a rejection of the external world in the search for some form of Truth, certainty, or understanding of the universal. This scorn for all things external to oneself would align Gracián firmly with the emerging Rationalism of his time. However, just as Gracián's alleged Machiavellianism is overridden by a strong sense of Christian morality upon close reading of the treatises,

equally, any disdain for the external world is combatted by a strong sense of the necessity of engagement with the world, not just for the pleasure to be found in community and good company, but also for epistemological and moral motivations. This means that, ultimately, any other-worldly, contemplative, universal, and metaphysical tendencies in Gracián's treatises are constantly kept in check by a stress on the worldly, active, particular, and moral.

### *El Héroe*

*El Héroe* is written in the form of twenty *primores* with each *primor* centred around a piece of advice for becoming an *héroe*, for example: 'Que el héroe pratique incomprehensibilidades de caudal', 'Cifrar la voluntad', 'Eminencia en lo mejor' 'Excelencia de primero', 'Que el héroe prefiera los empeños plausibles', and 'Que el héroe ha de tener tanteada su fortuna al empeñarse'. Each *primor* is exemplified by at least one historical, contemporary, or mythical figure who demonstrates the quality being described, for example: Fernando el Católico, Alexander the Great, the Felipes of Spain, Hercules, Caesar, Fernando de Ávalos, and Hernando Álvarez de Toledo. The final *primor* collates the kings, emperors, captains, popes, and even one queen, who all serve as exemplary models of conduct for Gracián's ideal *héroe*.

Published in 1637, *El Héroe* was immensely popular at the time. Felipe IV publicly praised it, reportedly stating that "es muy donoso este brinquito; asegúroos que contiene cosas grandes" (Correa Calderón 1961: xxviii), and six editions of the text were printed within seven years (Coster 32). The success of *El Héroe* is not altogether surprising: in Spain at the time there was a fierce backlash against the 'immoral' politics of Machiavelli and there was an appetite for books of the 'mirrors for princes' genre which reconciled morality and worldly success. Coster points out that Franco-Condado Claudio Clemente published his *Machiavelismus iugulatus*, criticising Machiavellianism, just one year before *El Héroe* and that a copy of this text was to be found in Lastanosa's library (97). Gracián's equally anti-Machiavellian stance is revealed in the full title given to the manuscript version of his tract: *El Héroe. Candidado de la Grandeça. Amante de la fama, pretendiente de la Felicidad Inmortalidad* (although this title was subsequently crossed out). Nevertheless, it is evident from this designation that Gracián's focus in *El Héroe* is not on worldly success for its own sake and that his concerns are intertwined with "grandeça",

“fama”, “felicidad”, and “inmortalidad”, terms which come to take on an other-worldly signification within Gracián’s literary idiolect (Aurora Egido 2014: 35). With this focus, Gracián paves the way for texts such as Diego Saavedra Fajardo’s *Idea de un príncipe político cristiano*, published in 1640. Nevertheless, critics such as Aranguren have latched onto Gracián’s comment in his ‘Al lector’, which states that the text represents “una razón de estado de ti mismo” (42), to argue that *El Héroe* advocates for an astute and cunning “maquiavelismo personalista” (Cantarino 34). The result is that *El Héroe* has been interpreted as both sympathetic towards cunning Machiavellianism, and towards the idea of Christian virtue; as both encouraging of detached and selfish individualism, and of benevolent engagement with the world; and as both supportive of the idea that high birth and good Fortune are necessary for success, and of the idea that man can improve his fate through hard work.

Despite this critical disagreement, scholars agree, almost unanimously, that the focus of *El Héroe* is about how to acquire superiority over others. Correa Calderón, for example, states that *El Héroe* displays Gracián’s “juvenil entusiasmo por lo heroico y combativo, por el triunfo y la gloria, en que propone a la imitación un modelo de hombre superior” (1961: 213–4); González Roldán specifies that one of Gracián’s main interests when writing the text was to gain control of others (37); Marín Pina identifies domination as one of Gracián’s goals stating that “el heroísmo se define entonces como un gobierno de sí mismo que debe procurar una superioridad sobre los demás” (37); and Pelegrín states that “le Héros a obtenu un triomphe social plutôt que moral...il a amassé les honneurs plus que l’Honneur...il aurait gagné les amours plus que l’Amour” (206). This interpretative stance lends itself easily to a Machiavellian reading of the text. However, the key question to bear in mind is whether superiority over others in *El Héroe* is an end in itself, or whether this superiority serves a different purpose as a means towards a higher aim.

Within the text, Gracián both creates and collapses a certain distance between his ideal *héroe* and others, making it difficult to determine the function of the kind of superiority he describes. On one hand, he encourages gaining an understanding of the motivations and desires of others, whilst simultaneously recommending that one conceal one’s own motives. For example, in *primor II*, ‘Cifrar la voluntad’, he writes, “arguye eminencia de caudal penetrar toda voluntad ajena, y concluye superioridad saber celar la propia” (45). This creates a disparity between the *héroe* and those around him with the *héroe* enjoying superior insight. Nevertheless, he must also be

careful due to the fact that being an “eminencia” causes others to turn their attention and curiosity towards the *héroe*: “que la eminencia es imán de voluntades, es hechizo del afecto” (VI, 60). The idea that the “eminencia” casts a kind of spell hints at a calculated manipulation of other people and their admiration. This ability to command attention from others is summed up in the concept of *despejo*, which Gracián defines as “alma de toda prenda, vida de toda perfección, gallardía de las acciones, gracia de las palabras y hechizo de todo buen gusto...De suerte que es perfección de la misma perfección, con trascendente beldad, con universal gracia” (XIII, 77). The language here – “perfección de la misma perfección”, “trascendente beldad”, “universal gracia” – suggests that *despejo* sets the *héroe* apart, and indeed bestows a certain divinity upon him, distancing him from the all too human people who cast their admiration in his direction.

Nevertheless, Gracián appears to try to reconcile this superiority with the importance of engaging with others: in *primor XII* he describes how a leader should go about winning the favour of his citizens, recommending that the leader achieve “esta gracia universal” using “diligencia propia” (74): gaining admiration is something that must be worked at and a successful leader must identify with his people, get to know them, celebrate with them, and be kind to them: “el más poderoso hechizo para ser amado es amar” (XII, 75). Furthermore, Gracián stipulates that the *héroe* must work to cultivate likeability and avoid displaying any kind of antipathy (XV, ‘De la simpatía sublime’). Gracián’s *héroe* is therefore expected to be superior to and distanced from others, but he is also expected to relate to others and be relatable in return. With this in mind, it is easy to see how a Machiavellian interpretation of the text could be suggested, by interpreting the *héroe* as a figure whose superiority facilitates the manipulation of others, but also how it would fail to capture the precise nuance of Gracián’s thinking.

In the first *primor* of the text, entitled ‘Que el héroe pratique incomprehensibilidades de caudal’, Gracián expands upon the effect that being a simultaneously detached and relatable figure has: “todos te conozcan, ninguno te abarque; que con esta treta, lo moderado parecerá mucho y lo mucho infinito, y lo infinito más” (44). The idea is that the *héroe* is known by others in such a way that he dazzles them with his reputation and achievement, without ever really being understood by them. The spectator, overwhelmed by admiration, attributes a kind of divinity to the *héroe*. However, while in a Machiavellian interpretation this

bedazzlement of the spectator could be manipulated by the *héroe* for personal gain, Gracián makes sure, in his final *primor*, to reveal the link between this worldly admiration and something more other-worldly: “todo héroe participó tanto de felicidad y de grandeza cuanto de virtud, porque corren paralelas desde el nacer al morir” (92). The mention of death here indicates the ultimate focus of Gracián’s theorising, which is consistent throughout his writings. The language used – “felicidad”, “grandeza” – also refers us back to the full title of the text which stressed to us that Gracián’s focus is not on worldly success for its own sake. By transposing “grandeza” onto “virtud”, Gracián is revealing that he believes “grandeza” to be intertwined with virtuous action: superiority, or *despejo*, goes hand in hand with virtue, rendering it a mere outward manifestation of interior morality. In other words, superiority over others and “grandeza” are not ends in themselves. Rather, they are indicators of the *héroe*’s high moral standards, or virtue, which will be recognised at the end of his life. The idea of gaining the admiration of others, and the moral end of this aim, will go on to be an important factor in *El Criticón*, in which Gracián’s idea of worldly fame is also conceptualised as a reward for virtuous conduct and not as an end in itself (see chapter five).

Several questions immediately emerge: is the *héroe* admired by others because he is virtuous or is he virtuous because he is admired by others? If the latter is true, and the admiration of others is a prerequisite of virtue, then how attainable is virtue for the average person? Is an *héroe* inevitably going to be a king, a prince, or a great ruler? Is one born an *héroe* or can this status be acquired? Gracián’s stance is not altogether clear on this point and this has led to contradictory readings of the text. Correa Calderón, for example, argues that Gracián’s *héroe* represents an unattainable ideal, “un símbolo en abstracto, la conjunción de perfecciones anheladas en un tipo ideal del hombre” (1961: 145). At the other end of the spectrum, Marín Pina believes that *El Héroe* “se despersonaliza o despolitiza para transformarse en un tratado moral, antes que político, en un manual de conducta válido en principio para cualquier persona” (35). Egido, on the other hand, concedes that Gracián’s *héroe* is likely a kingly figure, but that Gracián humanises the figure of the king by stressing the importance of feeling, emotion, and, what she terms “corazón” in royalty, contrasting with the detached, God-like, and objective figure that a king is usually expected to be (2001a: 23).

The text provides evidence for each of these interpretations. The *héroe* as “símbolo en abstracto”, described by Correa Calderón, is exemplified in *primor VI* and *primor XVIII*. In the latter, entitled ‘Emulación de ideas’, Gracián describes the way in which the *héroe* should be so perfect that he comes to represent the Platonic Ideal of himself which others then use as a model to emulate. This means that the *héroe* comes to embody the universal concept of himself and that those who aspire to emulate him represent earthly particulars of the universal *héroe*: “grande excelencia en una intensa singularidad, cifrar toda una categoría y equivalerla” (VI, 58). The *héroe*, by achieving perfection in his own being, negates, in a way, all those below him who strive to emulate him. This also means that the *héroe*, philosophically speaking, is a ‘concept’ which inhabits the Platonic realm of universal Forms, detached from worldly reality: “poco es menester para individuo, mucho para universal; y son tan raros estos, que se niegan comúnmente a la realidad si se conceden al concepto” (VI, 58). The famous final line of the text builds upon this image of the *héroe* as God-like and detached from the world by specifying that his ultimate goal should lie beyond this-worldly affairs: “ser héroe del mundo, poco o nada es; serlo del Cielo es mucho, a cuya gran Monarca sea la alabanza, sea la honra, sea la gloria” (94). Seemingly, earthly perfection is not enough for Gracián’s *héroe*, who must, rather, strive to attain perfection in another world.

The text also expounds the opposite point of view. In *primor VIII*, ‘Que el héroe prefiera los empeños plausibles’, Gracián stresses the necessity that the *héroe*’s remit remain firmly within realistic and easily conceptualised bounds, due to the fact that excessive metaphysical musing, such as the abstract idea that the *héroe* embodies the Platonic concept of himself, leads only to torment and ire for the spectator: “en los asuntos del ingenio triunfó siempre la plausibilidad. Lo suave de un discurso plausible recrea el alma, lisonjea el oído, que lo seco de un concepto metafísico los atormenta y enfada” (65). Gracián also humanises the *héroe* in *primor XIX*, the only faintly negative *primor* of the text, in which he describes people’s tendency to notice others’ faults, to gossip about them, and to try to destroy others’ reputation. Gracián undercuts this negativity by posing the simple question: “¿quién es el sol sin eclipses, el diamante sin raza, la reina de lo florido sin espinas?” (91). As Egido argues when she stresses that Gracián’s *héroe* possess both “corazón” and “rey”, everyone, even an *héroe*, will have weak points and this contributes to their strength.

Gracián appears to acknowledge the disparity between the two types of *héroe* that he offers: one, a Platonic Ideal, detached from worldly affairs; the other, a humanised figure, attentive to the needs of his spectator and plagued by mortal afflictions. His solution to this disparity is seemingly offered in the first *primor*, indicating that he was aware of his own contradiction and that he may have anticipated his readers' confusion in this respect. In this *primor*, entitled 'Que el héroe practique incomprehensibilidades de caudal', Gracián explains that if man cannot be infinite then he should at least strive to appear so. In other words, the *héroe* should emulate divinity as far as possible, knowing that he will never be able to attain it fully. He writes: "esta primera regla de grandeza advierte, si no es ser infinitos, a parecerlo, que no es sutileza común". And, as already quoted: "todos te conozcan, ninguno te abarque; que con esta treta, lo moderado parecerá mucho y lo mucho infinito, y lo infinito más" (I, 44). This represents a kind of compromise: man strives to embody divinity with his being, but must concede that this is beyond his remit. Indeed, the only divinity he can attain (i.e. the appearance of divinity) is dependent upon and bestowed by the gaze of others. As such, the *héroe's* other-worldliness (his divinity, his reputation, his ability to dazzle others) is intertwined with his worldliness (his ability to engage with others and garner their admiration). As Marín Pina argues, Gracián's *héroe* represents a debased saintly figure: man cannot become a saint so he should instead aim to become an *héroe*, the closest to a saint he can hope to attain in this world (42).

Having established that Gracián's *héroe* is not detached and God-like, but is, rather, a figure in constant interaction with the world, no matter how other-worldly the motivations for this interaction be, the question remains of whether *héroe*-status is reserved for the elite, or whether it can be attained by anyone. Gracián reveals the extent of his ambivalence when addressing this issue, via his attitude towards Fortune. At stake in this debate is the issue of whether man can improve his lot in life through hard work and virtuous action, or whether man's fate, and the extent of his success, both worldly and other-worldly, is already set in stone upon his birth. This has again led to varying critical responses. Egido argues that in *El Héroe* Gracián aligns himself with a Stoic vision of Fortune, which stipulates that man must accept and suffer his fate calmly, and can do very little to alter it (2014: 48). Coster broadly agrees with this interpretation and justifies it by suggesting that such an emphasis on good Fortune is simply another manifestation of Gracián's anti-Machiavellianism:

Machiavelli, in chapter XXV of *Il Principe*, puts forward the idea that Fortune only constitutes half of man's destiny, whilst his actions dictate the other half (88). In contrast, Coster argues that Gracián views Fortune and Providence as synonymous, meaning that all that happens in the world is predetermined by God's will. In making this argument, Coster hits upon one of the contradictions inherent in Christianity: if Fortune is Providence which is God's will, then what scope does man have to use his own free will to take virtuous action in order to earn salvation after death? In spite of this paradox, the coexistence of free will and Fortune/Providence was the standard theological position of Gracián's time, showing that Christian orthodoxy itself incorporated a certain degree of mysteriousness. González Roldán, for example, describes *El Héroe* as conforming to this position when he asserts that man can earn salvation after death through virtuous deeds during life, manifest in the fact that Gracián directs his text "a un destinatario que aspira a la grandeza por sus obras más que por su noble nacimiento" (29). And José María Andreu Celma likewise interprets Gracián's text as one which "resalta la bondad natural del hombre y su capacidad para obtener la salvación mediante las buenas obras" (95), in spite of the ultimate omnipotence of Fortune/Providence.

Gracián's contradictions in this respect are such that his precise attitude towards Fortune in *El Héroe* is difficult to decipher conclusively. In *primor X*, 'Que el héroe ha de tener tanteada su fortuna al empeñarse', he states that Fortune "no es otra, hablando a lo cuerdo y aun católico, que aquella gran madre de contingencias y gran hija de la Suprema Providencia, asistente siempre a sus causas, ya queriendo, ya permitiendo" (68). Here we see Gracián align Fortune with divine Providence and we see him stress the uncompromising nature of Fortune when he describes it as "aquella reina tan soberana, inescrutable, inexorable" (68), supporting Coster's interpretation of Gracián's approach to Fortune. In the following *primor* he also responds to those who criticise Fortune for its "inestabilidad de mujer" and "liviandad de joven" (XI 71) by arguing that Fortune's unpredictable turns "no son livianas de mujer, sino alternativas de una justísima Providencia" (XI 71). Such an image of Fortune affirms the omnipotence behind God's plan, which man often fails to understand and dismisses as the workings of fickle Fortune. It also appears to negate the possibility that man can change the tide of his Fortune by using his free will, through hard work or virtuous action.

At other times, Gracián displays a belief in the power of man's efforts to improve his life. Notably, in his 'Al lector', he states: "sacar un varón máximo; esto es milagro en perfección y, ya que no por naturaleza rey, por sus prendas es ventaja" (42). In this introduction, which sets the tone of the text, it would appear that Gracián is setting aside those born with good Fortune, "por naturaleza rey", as his sole focus, and is instead elevating the efforts of those who desire to improve their station "por sus prendas", who create their own Fortune through hard work. This is reiterated in *primor VI* when he compares those born with good Fortune and those who had to work hard in life, stating that "aquellas son hijas del favor, estas de la loable industria, y no suelen ser las menos nobles" (58). In *primor X*, in which Gracián offered the definition of Fortune which saw it aligned with Providence, he also contradictorily asserts that "lo cierto es que a todo héroe le apadrinaron el valor y la fortuna, ejes ambos de una heroicidad" (69). We therefore see that, at certain times, Gracián praises "industria" and "valor" as equally important for a successful life as being born with good Fortune. These contradictions, between hard work and good Fortune, free will and Providence, are difficult to synthesise, and theologians from all eras have debated them, and still do so today.<sup>38</sup> However, Gracián's stance appears to be that the *héroe* is likely to be born with good Fortune, but that he supplements this good Fortune, and lives up to his noble birth, by working hard and being courageous throughout his life. The key appears to be to "tener comprensión de su dicha" (X 69), so that the *héroe* understands fully the privileged position from which he inevitably begins, and with this self-knowledge to "vencerse a sí mismos si les está bailando el agua la fortuna" (XI 72), so that he avoids too drastic a downfall if the tide of Fortune turns against him.

The debates concerning the extent of Gracián's similarities to Machiavelli, the status of his *héroe* as detached from or engaged with the world, and the necessity of good Fortune in life all, understandably, split critical opinion. They show that, in the early stages of his writing, Gracián was grappling with several contradictions which he had not yet satisfactorily reconciled, or which he had not yet learnt to express in such a way as to demonstrate clearly how their reconciliation functions. However,

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<sup>38</sup> For example, different approaches towards the Providence/free will debate contributed to much of the conflict, during Gracián's time, between the Jesuits and the Jansenists, with the latter group emphasising the role of predestination and minimising that of free will (see, for example, Pelegrín 27–30, 192–4).

one element of Gracián's thought, often overlooked in *El Héroe*, is the establishment of what may be termed his 'philosophy', manifest in a collection of recurring key words: 'juicio', 'ingenio', 'agudeza', and 'gusto'. This 'philosophy' is encouragingly consistent throughout Gracián's works, from *El Héroe* to *El Criticón* and *El Comulgatorio*, and offers the reader a constant amidst the fluctuation of other ideas.

In *primor III* Gracián expands upon the ideas of *juicio* and *ingenio*. He explains that understanding is made up of these two components, stating, "fondo de juicio y elevación de ingenio... forman un prodigio si se juntan" (48), and he is at pains to stress the necessary complementarity of these two concepts: "señaló pródigamente la filosofía dos potencias al acordarse y al entender. Súfrasele a la política con más derecho introducir división entre el juicio y el ingenio, entre la sindéresis y la agudeza" (48). We see here that *juicio* is aligned with *sindéresis*, which relates to the divine spark within the soul of man left behind after the fall, which allows him to access certain truths, while *ingenio* is aligned with *agudeza*. As such, we can deduce that *juicio* is the word that Gracián uses to designate what we would typically term 'reason', of the type espoused by the emerging Rationalism of his time. This is supported by Gracián's comment at the close of this *primor*: "no abodo por el juicio, pues él habla por sí bastantemente" (51). *Juicio*, or reason, and *sindéresis* are ideas with which his reader is already very familiar, and he has no need to expand upon their merits.

Instead, Gracián tends to focus his efforts on expounding the lesser-known role of *ingenio*. We see this tendency in the often-quoted line: "es el juicio trono de la prudencia, es el ingenio esfera de la agudeza; cuya eminencia y cuya medanía deba preferirse, es pleito ante el tribunal del gusto" (49). Gracián elevates the status of *ingenio* to the same heights as *juicio* by using language and imagery usually reserved for reason when he describes *ingenio* as "sol de este mundo en cifra, si no rayo, vislumbre de divinidad". This succeeds in bestowing upon *ingenio* and *agudeza* the same divine origins as *juicio* and *sindéresis*. Whilst the exact nature of the roles played by *ingenio* and *agudeza* in the process of understanding are not explained clearly in this *primor*, or elsewhere in *El Héroe*, it is evident that Gracián himself has a clear view of how they work, and he makes an effort to share this with his reader, explaining briefly, "son los dichos y hechos ajenos en una fértil capacidad semillas de la agudeza, de las cuales, fecundado el ingenio, multiplica cosecha de prontitudes y abundancia de agudezas" (51). This explanation brings little clarity. Indeed, clarity on

this matter only comes with the publication of the *Arte de ingenio, tratado de la agudeza* several years later. However, it does reiterate the fact that Gracián's *héroe*, via the implementation of *ingenio* in the process of understanding, must be fully engaged with the "dichos y hechos" of the world around him, and must reject the Rationalists' emphasis on interior *juicio*/reason as the sole source of knowledge and certainty.

The lack of clarity surrounding the way in which *ingenio* and *agudeza* function is addressed to a certain extent in *primor V* in which Gracián expounds his thoughts on 'Gusto relevante'. Here, Gracián presents his theory of *gusto* which at times seems to align with our everyday idea of 'taste', as a way of describing a person's personal preferences, usually in aesthetic matters (such as art, literature, style, or fashion). For example, he seemingly outlines the idea of 'uncultivated', 'base', or 'bad taste' in this respect when he states that "la admiración es comúnmente sobrescrito de la ignorancia; no nace tanto de la perfección de los objetos, cuanto de la imperfección de los conceptos" (56), meaning that often those who admire something do so because their very idea of what that something should be is flawed. Similarly, he states that "las sobras de alabanza son menguas de la capacidad y...el que alaba sobrado, o se burla de sí o de los otros" (57). In other words, excessive praise for something is usually a sign of a lack of understanding. This conception of *gusto* in terms of "admiración", "perfección de los objetos", and "alabanza" places it within the camp of the aesthetic.

However, Gracián also intertwines his conception of *gusto* with *ingenio* which, alongside *juicio*, is one of the faculties of understanding (i.e. it serves an epistemological function). As already quoted, *ingenio* is described as "pleito ante el tribunal del gusto" (49), and Gracián states that "hay cultura de gusto, así como de ingenio" and that, "Ingenio sublime nunca crió gusto ratero" (55). As such, there is an undeniable link between *gusto* and *ingenio* which is not to be expected if each were to stick to their respective aesthetic and epistemological remits. Gracián expands upon his epistemological conception of *gusto* when he writes that "péganse los gustos con la comunicación, y es suerte topar con quien le tiene superlativo" (55), indicating that *gusto* may not be a purely intuitive appreciation of something which is aesthetically pleasing to the viewer, but is, rather, a type of judgement which can be refined through experience and by learning from others (Gadamer 32). This is supported at the close of the *primor* when Gracián states that "solo un gran conocimiento,

favorecido de una gran práctica, llega a saber los precios de las perfecciones” (57). Gracián makes an appreciation of “los precios de las perfecciones” dependent upon both “una gran práctica” and “un gran conocimiento”. This means that *gusto*, usually associated with intuitive aesthetic experience, becomes dependent upon the understanding which is, in turn, dependent upon *juicio* and, particularly here, upon *ingenio*. In this way, Gracián intertwines the epistemological and the aesthetic. This aspect of his ‘philosophy’, already well established in his first publication, if briefly articulated, will go on to be significant in the *Arte de ingenio, tratado de la agudeza*, the *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*, and *El Criticón*.

From this analysis, it emerges that *El Héroe* is a contradictory text in many ways: Gracián’s *héroe* must be superior in a way which could be interpreted as Machiavellian, but this superiority is revealed as indicative of the *héroe*’s interior virtue; Gracián’s *héroe* must represent the Platonic ideal of himself, but his other-worldliness is dependent upon the admiration of those situated firmly within the worldly realm; Gracián’s *héroe* most likely enjoys the blessing of high birth and good Fortune, but he must also work hard and implement his free will in order to secure his fate; and Gracián’s *héroe* must utilise the faculty of *ingenio* when it comes to gaining understanding about the world, but this understanding, usually a product of a cold and objective process for the Rationalists, is conflated with intuitive aesthetic experience. This section has interpreted these contradictions with a largely reconciliatory spirit, which takes for granted that Gracián was not simply confused by and undecided about the dualities with which he was grappling. However, it is true that he does not always make the bases for the various reconciliations offered in this section very clear for his readers.

Nevertheless, on a final note, two aspects of Gracián’s thought are clear in *El Héroe*: his religious orthodoxy and his Optimism. Gracián’s focus on religion is manifest in his anti-Machiavellian stress on the Christian idea of virtue, in his belief in the coexistence of free will and Fortune/Providence, and in his elevation of *ingenio* and *agudeza* to the same status as *juicio* and *synderesis*. Gracián’s Optimism is manifest by the fact that the text overwhelmingly rejects a detached and isolationist approach to the exterior world, and instead encourages interaction with the world and engagement with others in order to: cultivate virtue, relate to others, be relatable to others, earn admiration, enhance one’s Fortune, and gain understanding via the implementation of *ingenio* and *gusto*.

### *El Político*

*El Político* is a relatively short text, written in continuous prose, which extols the virtues of Fernando el Católico, amongst other historical figures. Coster argues that the text's brevity and legerity make it likely that it was primarily oral in nature and intended for public reading, perhaps in Huesca at a meeting of the literary figures who surrounded Lastanosa. Despite Gracián's evident fondness for the text, manifest when he mentions it in *El Criticón* alongside such texts as Castiglione's *Il libro del Cortegiano*, this section will share Coster's opinion that it is "de elocuencia un poco hueca" (109). *El Político* was written in 1640, just after Gracián had spent time at Court in Madrid and had then gone to Zaragoza to serve the Duke of Nochera. This insight into courtly politics may have inspired in Gracián what Correa Calderón terms a "juvenile enthusiasm" for all things daring and combative, leading to a text which more purely conforms to the 'mirrors for princes' genre than *El Héroe*, but which also fails to develop the most thought-provoking strands of this first text (1961: 45). In this sense, *El Político* can be considered somewhat underwhelming.

Whilst in *El Héroe* Gracián is ambivalent about the extent to which *héroe*-status is attainable for the average person, his *político*, on the other hand, is unequivocally an elite and God-like figure, as highlighted by Pedro de Abella in the 'Censura' to the text when he states that *El Político* "podrá servir de ejemplo a príncipes y de idea a los mayores monarcas" (97). Nevertheless, for the most part, *El Político* follows *El Héroe* by responding to the Machiavellianism of the time, by uniting politics and morality while doing so, and by displaying the same uncertainty towards Fortune. Despite the lack of real development in *El Político*, the text does mention for the first time a connection which will go on to form a central crux of Gracián's thought: the connection between Fortune and prudence, briefly touched upon in this text, but indicative of an emerging shift in attitude towards Fortune which will culminate in the late treatises and which will come to the fore in *El Criticón*.

González Roldán argues that Gracián's *político* is presented as a more 'human' figure than his *héroe*, claiming that, in *El Político*, "[no] pide Gracián en el monarca la constante ocultación de los afectos que sí exige en *El Héroe*. Nuevamente parece dar más importancia a las virtudes naturales y su manifestación exterior natural, sin atender demasiado a las necesidades de su presentación artificiosa", and

that “de la misma manera que es vicio un exceso de cualquier pasión, su ausencia total es reprochable” (73). However, there is very little evidence in the text to support González Roldán’s humanisation of Gracián’s *político*. As Egido extensively outlines, Gracián does not use the historical figure of Fernando el Católico to bring his examples of good conduct closer to reality and to make them more palpable to his reader. Rather, he uses the particular examples provided by history to extract an educational, and universal, lesson. In other words, history is used as a tool of moral philosophy, in typical Jesuit fashion (Egido 2000: 121). The result of this is that Gracián abstracts from the concrete examples of Fernando el Católico’s conduct in order to “convertir a los personajes y a los hechos del pasado en valores universales e imperecederos que trascienden la propia historia para convertirse en verdades filosóficas inamovibles para el presente y el futuro” (Egido 2000: 152). We can track this shift in favour of the transcendent over the particular when Gracián describes Fernando el Católico as “el oráculo mayor de la razón de Estado” (102), which we can compare to the description of *El Héroe* as “una razón de Estado de ti mismo” (42).

The result of this use of history is that Gracián’s *político* embodies the “símbolo en abstracto” outlined by Correa Calderón in reference to *El Héroe* (1961: 145). In the same way that in this text Gracián described, at times, his ideal *héroe* as a Platonic Ideal, so perfect that he inhabits the realm of Platonic concepts and emulated to such a degree that he represents the universal concept of himself, while those who emulate him become earthly particulars below him, Gracián presents his *político* in a similar way. He does this by stressing the formidable ability of the Spanish crown, and of Fernando el Católico in particular, to unite and to sit at the head of a wide range of diverse kingdoms and peoples. For example, we read: “hay también grande distancia de fundar un reino especial y homogéneo dentro de una provincia al componer un imperio universal de diversas provincias y naciones”, and “en la monarquía de España, donde las provincias son muchas, las naciones diferentes, las lenguas varias, las inclinaciones opuestas, los climas encontrados, así como es menester gran capacidad para conservar, así mucha para unir” (105). Not only does Gracián elevate Fernando el Católico to the heights of perfect leader with hundreds of imitators looking up to him, stating: “de don Fernando el Católico, se pudieran hacer cien hombres famosos si se hubieran de repartir sus atributos, si se hubieran de repartir sus prendas” (124); he also, in Platonic fashion, elevates the Spanish crown

itself into the Platonic Ideal of monarchy, placed above all others as a perfect example of empire to emulate.

This conception of monarchy in general and of the *político* in particular as transcendent, otherworldly, universal and, as a result, dehumanised, is reinforced by Gracián's repeated alignment of the *político* with religion and with God. Gracián describes the Casa de Asturia as “casa que la extendió Dios por toda la redondez de la tierra, para dilatar por toda ella su Santa Fe y Evangelio”, making a clear connection between his ideal *político* (Fernando el Católico) and the divine (157). Furthermore, not only did Fernando el Católico gather various kingdoms and nations under one figurehead, himself, but, in doing so, managed to unite these kingdoms and nations with God: “conquistó reinos para Dios, coronas para tronos de su Cruz, provincias para campos de la Fe, y, al fin, él fue el que supo juntar la tierra con el Cielo” (130). For this reason, “el día que murieron Fernando y Carlos, su gran nieto, lloró toda la cristiandad” (154). This paints Fernando el Católico as a liminal figure between the worldly and the other-worldly, the earthly and the divine, which elevates him to great heights, but which fails to offer any practical advice for an aspiring leader who aims to follow in his footsteps, the latter of which *El Héroe* does succeed in doing more effectively, despite the moments in which it also presents the *héroe* as a kind of Platonic Ideal.

Nevertheless, as Moraleja Juárez argues, Gracián's *político*, like his *héroe*, is not a distanced and aloof figure in the service of Machiavellian ends, and he instead offers “una forma política preñada de contenidos éticos-religiosos” (2002: 12). We see this when Gracián states at the beginning of the text: “apreciaré reglas ciertas, no paradojas políticas, peligrosas ensanches de la razón, estimando más la seguridad que la novedad” (102). Gracián associates Machiavellianism with a warped form of reason and with a misplaced and foolish desire for novelty. The implicit condemnation of Machiavellian politics is reiterated when he states that,

Vulgar agravio es de la política el confundirla con la astucia: no tienen algunos por sabio sino al engañoso, y por más sabio al que más bien supo fingir, disimular, engañar, no advirtiendo que el castigo de los tales fue siempre perecer en el engaño (129).

Gracián, rather, prefers to describe a “político prudente, no político astuto, que es grande diferencia” (128). In this vein, he places little value on conquest and on the accumulation of power for their own sake, instead emphasising the importance of good government, in terms of cultivating justice systems, solid religious practices,

and a stable economy, stating that “la eminencia real no está en el pelear, sino en el gobernar” (123).

Egido argues that this shift in focus from the “príncipe guerrero” to the “príncipe sabio” is Gracián’s greatest contribution to the ‘mirrors for princes’ genre and that this is made most explicit in *El Político* (2001a: 33). We see this, for example, when Gracián describes the stages of man’s life and outlines his typical temperament at each point: “piden las edades sus empleos: compete el valor a la mocedad” (111), whereas “apetece la vejez todo lo contrario, ama la paz, porque el sosiego da leyes, reforma las costumbres, compone la república, establece el imperio” (112). Gracián’s *político* does not ruthlessly accumulate power for personal gain, but instead engages with the world in order to try to understand it. This allows him to gain the knowledge necessary, not only to gain power, but to sustain it in the service of Christianity: “haciase señor de todo por la noticia para serlo por la potencia. Matriculó primero Augusto todo su imperio en la cabeza, y después lo tuvo en el puño” (133). For this reason, Gracián states that the “mayor atributo [of the *político*] ha de ser el abarcar, el entender” (131), predicts that “será feliz el mundo... cuando comenzaren a reinar los sabios” (130), and sums up his *político* as “este príncipe comprensivo, prudente, sagaz, penetrante, vivo, atento, sensible y, en una palabra, sabio” (135).

This focus on observation and acquired knowledge means that Gracián, at times, seems to present the *político* as a figure who can be moulded and perfected through practice. We see this idea, for example, when he writes: “nace, no se adquiere, el dado óptimo, el don perfecto, que descende del Padre de las ilustraciones. Bien que crece con la industria y se perfecciona con la experiencia” (131). However, as is also manifest here, and as Coster too argues (1961: 105), Gracián still strongly associates his ideal *político* with the gift of high birth and good Fortune, as his position as detached and God-like would have already led us to conclude. For example, he states at the beginning of the text that “las principales de estas heroicas prendas son antes favores del celestial destino que méritos del propio desvelo”, and that “hijos fueron de esta divina elección suprema” (104). In this way, Gracián displays the same ambivalence towards the role of Fortune as he displayed in *El Héroe*, inherent in Christianity itself. As in this earlier text, he makes a point of aligning Fortune with divine Providence, stating: “es la Providencia suma autora de

los imperios, que no la ciega vulgar fortuna” (117), reiterating his fundamentally Christian position regarding the paradox of free will and Fortune/Providence.

The evident disparity between a “político prudente”, who must observe the world and learn to rule well through experience, and a *político* who is merely born into his position of leadership is addressed, to a certain extent, when Gracián writes: “no fue afortunado Fernando, sino prudente, que la prudencia es madre de la buena dicha... todos los más prudentes príncipes fueron muy afortunados” (135). Here, we see emerge, albeit briefly, a challenge to the necessity of good Fortune in success in the form of the idea of prudence. Prudence stipulates that man continuously learn from his past decisions and experiences and use these to inform and better his choices in the present. This entails the idea that man can develop, and can improve and influence his fate through careful reflection and the continuous development of his understanding, rather than living his life wholly dependent upon good Fortune for his success. Whilst the depiction of the *político* as both chosen by God and God-like still clearly signals the importance Gracián grants to high birth and good Fortune on the path to success, his stress on the “político sabio”, and his comment here on the importance of prudence as “madre de la buena dicha”, allow us to glimpse a worldview in progress: one which is grappling with conflicting approaches to the world and which will eventually do away with the necessity of being born with good Fortune completely, but which will only do so convincingly years later in *El Criticón*.

### *El Discreto*

*El Discreto* is written in the form of twenty-five prose *realces* with each *realce* centred around a piece of advice for Gracián’s ideal *discreto*. For example: ‘Del señorío en el decir y en el hacer’, ‘De la galantería’, ‘Hombre de plausibles noticias’, ‘No sea desigual’, ‘El hombre de todas las horas’, ‘No estar siempre de burlas’, ‘De la hazañería’, and ‘Del modo y agrado’. In this sense, *El Discreto* is very similar to *El Héroe*, and Lastanosa even comments in his note to the text that “émulo es del *Héroe*, más que hermano” (44). However, in contrast to *El Héroe*, Gracián writes each *realce* using a different form. For example: eulogy, academic essay, allegory, memorial, letter, fable, dialogue, satire, and panegyric. In the same way as the oral nature of *El Político* was stressed by Coster, Correa Calderón has put forward the idea that the

*realces* of *El Discreto* may have been based on conversations held by the literary group in Huesca at the time (1961: 170).

Correa Calderón and Cantarino point out that in 1646, when *El Discreto* was published, Gracián was in his forties and was entering a reflective phase of his life, in which the influence of Seneca and Neo-Stoicism was taking over (1961: 214 and 13, respectively). This reflective phase is manifest by the fact that *El Discreto* advances Gracián's approach to the various dichotomies with which he was grappling in a much more satisfactory way than in *El Político*. Worth noting in this respect is that the *Arte de ingenio, tratado de la agudeza* was published in 1642, between *El Político* and *El Discreto*. This confirms that Gracián had likely developed his thinking between the two texts with the ideas of *ingenio* and *agudeza* coming particularly to the fore, the seeds of which, as we have seen, were planted in *El Héroe*.

*El Discreto* continues where *El Héroe* left off in several other aspects: while still directed towards an elite reader, *El Discreto* is not addressed primarily to royalty or political leaders in the same way as *El Político*, and instead picks up on the idea, first expounded in *El Héroe*, that status as a *discreto* may be possible for any man. Like *El Héroe*, *El Discreto* reveals Gracián to be unequivocally concerned with this-worldly affairs, even if his focus on them be for other-worldly ends (i.e. the cultivation of virtue to be rewarded by salvation after death). Furthermore, *El Discreto* continues the development of Gracián's 'philosophy' by expounding in more detail the roles of *ingenio* and *agudeza*. *El Discreto* also builds upon *El Político* in one important respect: whilst retaining the characteristic, Christian contradiction between free will and Fortune/Providence, Gracián puts forward more clearly in *El Discreto* the case for an attitude towards Fortune and Providence tempered by the idea of prudence. This sees the insight gained from worldly experience trump the predetermined benefits bestowed by noble birth, a tendency which supports the reading of *El Discreto* as a worldly text of practical advice for everyman, even if this reading is not completely clear-cut and unproblematic.

Moraleja Juárez claims that, in *El Discreto*, Gracián "se desvincula de la sociedad cortesana" by taking a reflective and introspective turn (1999: 41). This kind of reading perpetuates the interpretation frequently put forward of Gracián as isolationist, suspicious of the external world, closed off from others, and focused on interiority as the only source of certainty in a hostile world. On the other hand, Correa

Calderón argues the opposite, by claiming that *El Discreto* offers precisely the same kind of courtly advice offered by Castiglione in *Il libro del Cortegiano* (1961: 272). This section will agree with the approach taken by Correa Calderón and described by Coster when he writes that, in *El Discreto*, “no se trata ya de formar el gran hombre, el hombre de Estado, el Capitán o el Soberano; el objeto del autor es ahora más modesto: como lo habían hecho Castiglione...se dirige al simple particular, o, con más exactitud, al hombre del mundo” (113). Rather than isolating himself from the exterior world, Gracián’s *discreto* understands that “to become a *persona* one must master the techniques of public representation”, and that “the supreme form of practical wisdom is to understand the demands of public opinion and to manipulate appearances in order to meet expectations” (Spadaccini and Talens 21). This means that man’s success, encapsulated in the idea of becoming a *persona*, is intertwined with how he interacts with others, an idea we first saw posited in *El Héroe*. The focus on interiority in the quest for some form of certainty, so central to the Rationalists and stressed in Moraleja Juárez’s interpretation, is proven to be misplaced when it comes to Gracián’s *El Discreto*. Gracián, rather, stresses the mutual dependency of the interior and the exterior, as Spadaccini and Talens point out when they state that Gracián “equates ‘being’ with being public, what ‘is’ with what is ‘seen’, and thus the gap between public and inner self in closed” (21). This intertwinement of “being” and “being public” hints at the ontological interdependence between *ser* and *parecer* which Gracián develops in his *Arte de ingenio/Agudeza*, which will be analysed in the following chapter.

This focus on the exterior world and on interaction with others is highlighted in the role Gracián grants to friendship within *El Discreto*. This is evident from the very first *realce* when he states: “gran suerte es topar con hombre de su genio y de su ingenio. Arte es saberlos buscar, conservarlos mayor. Fruición es el conversable rato y felicidad la discreta comunicación” (59). We therefore see that rather than endorse a retreat inwards, Gracián places companionship in very high esteem. In *realce VII*, he similarly praises the merits of having “unos amigos universales, de genio y de ingenio, hombres para todas horas, siempre de sazón y de ocasión” (90), and stresses the importance of surrounding oneself with a carefully selected group of people in *realce X* when he states that “no es el menor empeño escoger los amigos, que han de ser de elección y no de acaso” (111). This creates an image of the *discreto* as someone who actively seeks out and enjoys the good company of others, and this

tendency to look outwards is further emphasised in *realce VII* when Gracián praises those who assimilate themselves fully into the cultural life of the time, by taking an interest in such things as paintings, buildings, gardens, precious stones, antiquity, history, and philosophy.

In the same *realce*, Gracián stresses the necessity of being an attentive interlocutor when he criticises “sísifos de la conversación que apedrean con un tema” (90), without due regard to reading the level of interest of those who are listening, and warns the reader that “siempre hablar atento causa enfado; siempre chancear, desprecio; siempre filosofar entristece y siempre satirizar desazona” (91). As González Roldán points out, the success of the *discreto* depends on his ability to read situations and to “portar diversas máscaras o ejecutar distintos papeles según exijan las circunstancias” (94). For this reason, Gracián describes the *discreto* as someone who “ha de hacer uno solo todos los personajes, a sus tiempos y ocasiones: ya el de risa, ya el de llanto, ya el del cuerdo y, tal vez, el del necio” (92). The importance of adapting to one’s circumstances is summed up in *realce X* when Gracián poses the simple question: “¿qué importa que sean muy al gusto del orador las cosas si no lo son al del auditorio?” (109). In this way, Gracián shows that his *discreto* is not an isolated figure detached from the world and with no interest in earthly affairs. He is, rather, someone who is concerned with the opinions of others, interested in forging connections, and who strives to make himself agreeable to all.

In *realce VII*, entitled, ‘Buen entendedor’, Gracián explains how the *discreto* can go about learning to analyse situations in order to facilitate making a positive impression on others. In this dialogue between a speaker referred to as the ‘autor’ and the ‘doctor’ (Juan Francisco Andrés), the author encourages the cultivation of knowledge in order to understand others better, to which the doctor replies: “así como previene la cordura el qué dirán, la sagacidad ha de observar el qué dijeron. Saltea insidiosa esfinge el camino de la vida y el que no es entendido es perdido. Enigma es, y dificultoso, esto del conocerse un hombre” (97–8). We see here that observation of others’ past words and actions is the best way of understanding them better moving forward, but we also see that this is not an easy insight to achieve. The ‘autor’, a few lines later, explains how the *discreto* should go about gaining this insight, stating that “el primer paso del saber es saberse” (98). With this iteration of the Delphic maxim, ‘Know thyself’, Gracián does seemingly present the merits of a retreat into oneself (the maxim is also used in *realces I* and *III*, 58 and 71, respectively). However, we

learn repeatedly throughout *El Discreto* that the purpose of this recourse to interiority is not an end in itself. Rather, the end of this process is to subsequently project outwards, and to use the insight gained into oneself via introspection to understand other people better and to inform one's interactions with them. Knowing oneself is therefore a stage in the process of knowing others.

The type of detachment endorsed by Gracián is therefore not isolation as a result of disdain for the external world, but is, rather, a type of isolation which leads to calm objectivity and, in turn, to understanding, which supports Correa Calderón and Cantarino's reading of *El Discreto* as heavily influenced by Neo-Stoicism. This kind of objectivity is described in *realce V*, 'Hombre de plausibles noticias', using the language of the theatre, which highlights the objective distance which Gracián is encouraging his *discreto* to adopt. For example, we read: "un modo de ciencia es éste que no lo enseñan los libros ni se aprende en las escuelas: cúrsase en los teatros del buen gusto", emphasising the idea that distanced observation facilitates a kind of learning which cannot be carried out through conventional study (79). And a few pages later, we read the result of this observation when Gracián states, in reference to the 'hombre de buenas noticias', that "su mayor realce es una juiciosa comprensión de los sujetos, una penetrante cognición de los principales personajes de esta actual tragicomedia de todo el universo" (81). This process of observing the world like a spectator observing a work of drama functions by allowing the *discreto* to remove himself from situations and to "hacer concepto de las cosas...procurando siempre de sacar enseñanza" (81). The result is that those who undertake the process of, first, knowing themselves, and then of observing others, subsequently use their understanding to emit an air of affability which draws the admiration of those around them: "luce, pues, en algunos una cierta sabiduría cortesana, una conversable sabrosa erudición que los hace bien recibidos en todas partes y aun buscados de la atenta curiosidad" (79). Gracián's *discreto* is thus acutely aware of himself as a public figure, a *persona*, and is constantly concerned with how he is viewed by others, and any detachment or isolation described in *El Discreto* is always, ultimately, in the service of this concern.

However, the insight the *discreto* gains via introspection and observation is not simply used to mould a public *persona* which is likeable to others. The understanding which results from both of these techniques also allows Gracián's

*discreto* to begin to distinguish between the inner self and public appearance of others. Gracián writes in *realce XXII*:

Tanto se requiere en las cosas la circunstancia como la sustancia; antes bien, lo primero con que topamos no son las esencias de las cosas sino las apariencias. Por lo exterior se viene en conocimiento de lo interior y por la corteza del trato sacamos el fruto del caudal (183).

Gracián, here, does not simply present the earthly world as pessimistically deceitful and unknowable, and the realm of eternal *ser* as completely inaccessible to man. Anticipating the lucid perceptive abilities of El Acertador, El Descifrador, and El Veedor de Todo in part three of *El Criticón*, Gracián instead offers in *El Discreto* an optimistic technique for navigating the world of *parecer* in such a way which allows him to come as close as possible to the world of *ser* as he can get. We read in *realce XIX*:

Hay zahoríes de entendimiento que miran por dentro las cosas: no paran en la superficie vulgar, no se satisfacen de la exterioridad, no se pagan de todo aquello que reluce; sírveles su criticuez de inteligente contraste para distinguir lo falso de lo verdadero (166).

While highlighting that the external world can be, and often is, deceptive, Gracián also stresses that “circunstancia”, “apariencias”, “exterior”, and “corteza”, outward and material manifestations of interiority, are the only route via which “sustancia”, interior essence, may be accessed. In doing so, and in opposition to the Rationalists, Gracián demonstrates, once again, his commitment to engagement with the external world as the only route via which his *discreto* is able to access some form of knowledge about the world.

In *El Discreto*, more than in any other of his preceding texts, Gracián’s ambivalent attitude towards the extent to which *discreto*-status can be attained by all is manifest. The text opens with an ‘aprobación’ by Manuel de Salinas and an ‘A los lectores’ by Lastanosa, which both highlight the unsuitability of the text for the *vulgo*. Salinas writes: “costóme su lectura admiración y cuidado, que ha menester tenerle el más perspicaz ingenio para no ocupar el tiempo sin lograrle, que hay distancia de lo que percibe el oído a lo que penetra el entendimiento” (45). Lastanosa brings the difficulty of Gracián’s writing to its logical conclusion when he states that “digo, pues, que no se escribe para todos y por eso es de modo que la arcanidad del estilo aumente veneración a la sublimidad de la materia, haciendo más veneradas las cosas el misterioso modo de decirlas” (51). Within the text, Gracián himself is also particularly condemnatory about the ability of the average person to improve his

station, writing in *realce II* that “nácense algunos con un señorío universal en todo cuanto dicen y hacen, que parece que ya la naturaleza les hizo hermanos mayores de los otros: nacieron para ser superiores, si no por dignidad de oficio, de mérito”, and continues: “salen otros del torno de su barro ya destinados para la servidumbre, de unos espíritus serviles, sin género de brío en el corazón, inclinados al ajeno gusto y ceder el propio a cuantos hay” (65–6). In a similar vein, he writes in *realce V* that “ni se hallen estas estimables noticias en gente vulgar, que en éstos nunca salen de su rincón ni el gusto ni el conocimiento; no dan ni un paso más adelante de lo que tienen presente” (84). Unsurprisingly, and as in his earlier works, we therefore see Gracián embrace the idea that noble birth and good Fortune are necessary for success, and his overt elitism and disdain for the lower classes is particularly palpable in *El Discreto*.

However, Gracián also expounds more comprehensively in this text than in any of his earlier ones precisely the opposite point of view, showing, again, his fundamental conformity to the standard theological position of his time. In *realce XII*, for example, in a letter addressed to the Canon Juan Orencio de Lastanosa, Gracián writes: “si yo creyera, a lo vulgar, que había Fortuna, también creyera, amigo canónigo y señor, que su casa era la casa con dos puertas” (119). Gracián is here referencing the idea that those born with Fortune (i.e. those who enter the world via the door of success) usually die without it (i.e. exit the world via the door of sorrow), and he stresses the importance we should place on how we end life rather than how we start it when he exclaims, “¡oh, gran extremo de la prudencia la atención a los extremos, al acabar bien, poniendo más la mira en la felicidad de la salida que en el aplauso de la entrada!” (121). This leads to the conclusion that what man does in between birth and death matters more than any type of innate superiority or the predetermined nobility with which he was born. Gracián states this explicitly in *realce II*, ‘Del señorío en el decir y en el hacer’, when he writes that “no basta la mayor especulación para dar este señorío: requiérese el continuado ejercicio en los empleos, que de la continuidad de los actos se engendra el hábito señorial” (63). The idea that constant practice and development is necessary in order to succeed in the world is repeated in *realce XVII* when Gracián writes, in reference to men, that “no de repente se hallan hechos. Vanse cada día perfeccionando, al paso que en lo natural en lo moral, hasta llegar al deseado complemento de la sindéresis, a la sazón del gusto y a la perfección de una consumada virilidad” (152). The belief that man can perfect himself throughout his life to arrive at a state of perfection with which he was not

necessarily born is shown particularly starkly when, in the same *realce*, Gracián goes so far as to claim that even a king “no se nace hecho”, and that, even for royalty, “son menester mil perfecciones para que llegue a tan grande complemento” (155).

We therefore see that Gracián, as briefly mentioned in *El Político*, advances a model of worldly success (i.e. good Fortune) which is dependent upon constant development and learning. In other words, the implementation of prudence is once again presented as the only way to improve the *discreto*'s fate, and to ensure that he does not exit life through the door of sorrow, regardless of the door via which he entered it. This is made explicit in *realce XXIII*, ‘Arte para ser dichoso’, a fable in which various people present themselves before Jupiter to complain about the lot Fortune has handed them in life. Jupiter sends out soldiers to track Fortune down and ask her why she provokes so many complaints. Fortune replies to Jupiter by asking, in reference to one of her complainants: “si él es un asno, ¿de quién se queja”, indicating that if a person is not worthy of good Fortune then there is little she can do (192). Jove laughs at this reply and summarises with the following advice: “disponed bien los medios y conseguiréis vuestros intentos y desengañense todos los mortales...que no hay más dicha ni más desdicha que prudencia o imprudencia” (192). This echoes *El Político*'s description of prudence as “madre de la buena dicha” (135). *El Discreto*, however, develops this idea further by linking prudence with the punishment or reward which the *discreto* will encounter at the end of his life, hinting at the fact that good Fortune is not synonymous with worldly success, and is, rather, something other-worldly. In other words, prudence serves a moral function in aiding man in his attempt to live a virtuous life and the ultimate reward of this will come after death.

As is perhaps to be expected given the intermediary publication of the *Arte de ingenio, tratado de la agudeza*, *El Discreto* builds upon *El Héroe*'s brief introduction into Gracián's ‘philosophy’. Whilst in *El Héroe* the importance of the concepts of *ingenio*, *agudeza*, *juicio*, and *gusto* was clear, the precise way in which they function was not explained with much clarity. In *El Discreto*, Gracián goes further in this respect, although the text still does not expound these concepts as clearly as the *Arte de ingenio* or the later *Agudeza*. The very first *realce* of the text is dedicated to ‘Genio e ingenio’, immediately demonstrating the importance of the latter concept in Gracián's worldview. As in *El Héroe*, Gracián extends the language and imagery of clarity and light, usually reserved for *juicio*/reason (see, for example, *El Crítico*),

1.II; 2.IV; and 3.III), to describe *ingenio* too, stating that “lo que es el sol en el mayor es en el mundo menor el ingenio” (56). Again, this succeeds in stressing the inherent divinity of *ingenio*, a characteristic which is usually reserved to describe reason/*juicio*, due to its roots in the divine process of synderesis. This demonstrates that *ingenio* is granted the same status as *juicio* and represents, in fact, a re-conceptualisation of what ‘reason’ is usually considered to be.

Whilst *El Héroe* gave us an insight into Gracián’s aesthetics-infused approach to epistemology, via the intertwinement of *ingenio* and *gusto*, *El Discreto* provides more detail on how this works: in *realce X*, ‘Hombre de buena elección’, Gracián points out that “ya todo es repetir...ya no queda qué hacer sino elegir” (107). As Batllori explains, during the Spanish Baroque, the Renaissance focus on faithful imitation was replaced by a focus on expressing things in a novel way. The ideas of emulation and originality therefore came to the fore (105). For Gracián, Batllori argues, this focus on novel expression was not just a literary style, but was an “estilo de pensar más que estilo de escribir” (115). Gracián expresses this in *realce XXII* of *El Discreto* when he writes that,

Siempre va el gusto adelante, nunca vuelve atrás: no se ceba en lo que ya pasó, siempre pica en la novedad; pero puédesele engañar con lo flamante del modillo: remózanse las cosas con las circunstancias y desmiéntese el asco de lo rancio y el enfado de lo repetido, que suele ser intolerable y más en imitaciones, que nunca pueden llegar ni a la sublimidad ni a la novedad de primero (185).

*Gusto*, we see here, is never stationary and is always moving “adelante”. Once it has been satisfied, this satisfaction grows “rancio” and “intolerable” over time, its impact wanes, and the task of the *discreto* is to find novel ways to renew it. In the same *realce*, Gracián continues: “vese esto más en los empleos del ingenio, que, aunque sean cosas muy sabidas, si el modo del decirlas en el retórico y del escribirlas en el historiador fuere nuevo, las hace apetecibles” (185). *Ingenio*, therefore, is implicated in this constant process of reviving *gusto*. It is the faculty which can take “cosas muy sabidas” and put them together in such a way that their impact is refreshed and leads once again to “la sublimidad” and “la novedad de primero”. This stress on recombining facets which are already well known, in order to re-reveal the truths inherent in them, helps us to understand the way in which Gracián intertwines the aesthetic and the epistemological: epistemologically, insight is being gained via *ingenio*’s novel recombination, but it is being revealed in such a novel way as to

provoke sublime *admiración*; and this *admiración* is reminiscent of the intuitive satisfaction one feels when faced with something aesthetically beautiful.

This means that *ingenio* and *gusto* are associated with renewal, whereas *juicio*, for Gracián, is associated with constancy and immovability, further confirming the alignment of this faculty with a conceptualisation of reason which views it as atemporal and objective, and with the conceptualisation of reason espoused by the Rationalists, as was first expounded in *El Héroe*. *Juicio* often functions in reaction to *genio*. Whilst *ingenio* in *realce I* is depicted as a divine faculty, on a par with reason, *genio* is depicted as a wholly earthly facet within man, prone to being influenced by irrational passions. For this reason, Gracián writes in this *realce* that “engaña muchas veces la pasión y no pocas la obligación, barajando los empleos a los genios” (58). To mitigate the dominance of *genio*/passion, Gracián recommends that the *discreto* learn to take a step back and to analyse situations in order to recognise when *genio* is taking control: “comience por sí mismo el discreto a saber sabiéndose” (58). This process is expanded upon in *realce XIV*, and is here connected to the faculty of *juicio*, when Gracián states that,

La vulgar alternación de los humores, ni aun de los afectos; siempre se mantiene superior a tan material destemplanza. Es efecto grande de la prudencia la reflexion sobre sí, un reconocer su actual disposición, que es un proceder como señor de su ánimo (135–6),

He then states a few pages later, simply, “corrígelo el juicio” (137). While *genio* indulges the passions, *juicio* detaches itself from these, like an outside observer, and allows the *discreto* to implement the Delphic maxim of knowing oneself.

It is therefore clear that both *ingenio* and *juicio* play different but important roles within man and this is stressed in *realce XVII* when Gracián describes the perfection each faculty attains as man ages: “con la mayor edad son ya mayores y más levantados los pensamientos: réalzase el gusto, purifícase el ingenio, sazónase el juicio, defécase la voluntad y, al fin, hombre hecho, varón en su punto” (153).

Nevertheless, as we saw in Moraleja Juárez’s interpretation of *El Discreto*, as a text which encourages isolated introspection, there has been a tendency to read *El Discreto*, and the majority of Gracián’s texts in general, in such a way that the role of *juicio*/reason is elevated above all else, and that the role of *ingenio* is largely forgotten and cast aside, despite its evident centrality to Gracián’s ‘philosophy’. Cantarino describes this interpretative tendency when she says,

La mayor parte de las interpretaciones y de las valoraciones de Gracián como “moralista” han incidido en el carácter racionalista de su pensamiento como elemento básico, contribuyendo así a ocultar los aspectos más originales, acordes con la nueva configuración de la ciencia político-moral, como son el papel de la experiencia y la intervención del ingenio en el proceso de conocimiento inductivo y en la constitución de máximas y reglas prácticas capaces de atenerse a las necesidades y circunstancias de cada momento (13).

Batllori also stresses that this tendency to elevate the role of rationality and reason/*juicio* in Gracián’s works leads to interpretations which focus on other-worldly, metaphysical questions, when, in actual fact, Gracián’s morality is just as worldly as it is other-worldly: “toda la obra de Gracián, por especulativa y racional que parezca, es más obra de un moralista, que de un metafísico puro” (42).

Such a rationalist reading of *El Discreto* fails to account for the majority of the advice it gives. For example, in the areas of making and retaining friends, of learning to be an attentive interlocutor, of analysing situations in order to further one’s understanding of the world, of getting to know oneself in order to comprehend the motivations of others, of learning to distinguish between appearance and reality, and of implementing prudence in order to improve one’s fate. Were Gracián a pure rationalist, who disdained the external world for the lack of certainty it can offer and who focused on interiority in the search for the certainty of universal Truth, he would not concern himself with these issues. Gracián’s *discreto* is undeniably implicated in the world around him. This explains the tripartite division of the *discreto*’s life which Gracián puts forward in the final *realce* of the text, when he writes,

Más ahorrando de erudita prolijidad, célebre gusto fue el de aquel varón galante que repartió la comedia en tres jornadas y el viaje de su vida en tres estaciones. La primera empleó en hablar con los muertos; la segunda, con los vivos; la tercera, consigo mismo (XXV, 200).

The *discreto* is not advised to retreat from the world and to live a life of contemplation, the aim of which is to cultivate and purify reason. Rather, he is encouraged to study in order to learn from those who have come before him (“hablar con los muertos”), to assimilate himself into the world and learn from those around him (“hablar con los vivos”), and, only as he approaches death, to devote himself to reflecting upon all he has seen and learned throughout his life (“hablar consigo mismo”). Even this final contemplative stage represents contemplation of life and not contemplation in a void. The importance of engaging with the world is reiterated a few pages later,

Todo cuanto entra por las puertas de los sentidos en este emporio del alma va a parar a la aduana del entendimiento: allí se registra todo. Él pondera, juzga, discurre, infiere y va

sacando quintaesencias de verdades. Traga primero leyendo, devora viendo, rumina después meditando, desmenuza los objetos, desentraña las cosas, averiguando las verdades y aliméntase el espíritu de la verdadera sabiduría (XXV, 204).

Everything which enters man via the earthly “sentidos”, so despised by the Rationalists, is here connected to “entendimiento”, and only via them can one extract “quintaesencias de verdades” which lead to what Gracián considers “la verdadera sabiduría”. This “verdadera sabiduría” is conceptualised not as certain knowledge of universals, but as a worldly form of knowledge which synthesises “los objetos” and “las cosas” that man has observed and experienced throughout his life.

As we have seen, *El Discreto* grapples largely with the same issues as Gracián’s previous texts: unlike *El Héroe* and *El Político*, it responds less pointedly to the immorality of Machiavellianism, and focuses instead on offering practical advice for the courtly *discreto*. As in these previous texts, the *discreto* to whom Gracián is offering his advice is most likely an elite figure, but one whose noble birth does not now guarantee him success, and who must instead implement prudence in order to make wise choices throughout his life, aligning Gracián’s thinking with the Christian necessity of implementing free will in order to carve one’s fate. Unlike Gracián’s *político*, his *discreto* is not a God-like figure, superior to others with an aloof attitude towards the world. Rather, he is actively engaged with the world, through friendships, conversation, and observation, and any detachment he displays is directed purely towards the end of furthering his understanding about the world which surrounds him.

Finally, the development of the idea of prudence in *El Discreto*, which builds upon the brief mention of this concept in both *El Héroe* and *El Político*, and which is slowly replacing the idea of good Fortune as an innate privilege, reveals an interesting insight into the nature of the success that Gracián envisages for his *discreto*. By mentioning the door of success and the door of sorrow via which man may enter and exit life in *realce XII*, and by emphasising that the door via which man exits life is more important than the one via which he enters, Gracián hints at the ultimate focus of his thought: life after death. This is evident in the final lines of the text, which read:

Es corona de la discreción el saber filosofar de todo, como solícita abeja, o la miel del gustoso provecho o la cera para la luz del desengaño. La misma Filosofía no es otro que meditación de la muerte, que es menester meditarla muchas veces antes para acertarla hacer bien una sola después (XXV, 205).

This does not mean that Gracián's concerns are purely other-worldly and metaphysical, but it does mean that the advice he offers for living in the world is not wholly in the service of worldly success, as it may initially appear to be. Although this idea is not fully developed in *El Discreto*, for Gracián, the type of worldly success he is encouraging also, conveniently, leads to success in life after death. In other words, the implementation of prudence causes one to lead a virtuous life which will be rewarded after death. This is hinted at in *El Discreto* when Gracián writes in *realce XI*, that “sola la virtud es la fénix que, cuando parece que acaba, entonces renace y eterniza en veneración lo que comenzó como aplauso” (123). This briefly articulated focus on virtue, and the role of prudence within this, will be further developed in the *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*, as its title would suggest, and will eventually go on to be central to Gracián's thinking in *El Criticón* and *El Comulgatorio*.

#### *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*

The *Oráculo manual*, published in 1647, contains three hundred aphorisms of courtly advice, presented in a somewhat haphazard and repetitive fashion (Coster 134; González Roldán 217). The aphorisms offered were supposedly extracted by Lastanosa from Gracián's previously published works. This provenance creates some uncertainty. Firstly, Lastanosa has previously (in his ‘A los lectores’ to *El Discreto*) referred to two texts by Gracián of which there are no known, extant copies, *El Varón Atento* and *El Galante* (59). Manuel de Salinas also refers to these texts in his ‘Soneto acróstico’ to *El Discreto*. And Gracián seems to confirm either their current or planned existence when he describes the *Oráculo* as containing “un rasgo de todos los doce Gracianes” in his ‘Al lector’ to the text, referring to the twelve texts in total that he planned to write (214). Were *El Varón Atento* and *El Galante* confirmed to exist, they would shed light on the source of some of the aphorisms in the *Oráculo* whose ideas do not seem to correspond directly with those expressed in other works by Gracián. Secondly, Lastanosa's role in the compilation of the *Oráculo* casts doubt upon the extent to which Gracián was involved in the making of the text. Correa Calderón and Coster argue that the *Oráculo* is evidently Gracián's handiwork, and that it is likely that Lastanosa simply helped out with its compilation (1961: 179 and 131, respectively). Were this the case, it seems reasonable to assume that Gracián

would inject new ideas into the *Oráculo* and would not simply reiterate, word-for-word, points which he had made in his previous publications (Egido 2001a: 47).

The *Oráculo* is similar to Gracián's previous works in the familiar ways: stress is placed on the importance of engagement with the world in the form of observing in order to advance one's understanding, interacting with others, meeting the expectations of one's audience, and taking into account particular circumstances when choosing the best course of action. Also advanced extensively in the *Oráculo* is the role of prudence in moulding one's fate, although Gracián displays a residual affinity towards the idea of innate good Fortune and predetermined Providence. However, the *Oráculo* is also very different to Gracián's previous texts in that, for the first time, an atmosphere of suspicion and hostility towards the outside world comes to the fore: there are many points at which the text appears to endorse the idea of isolating oneself from the external world, and of using one's distanced position to manipulate and gain superiority over others. One can therefore read the *Oráculo*, depending upon how one decides to approach the text, as both optimistically engaged with the world, in the same way as *El Héroe* or *El Discreto*, or as pessimistically detached from it, lending itself to both Machiavellian and rationalistic readings.

The fact that the *Oráculo* enjoyed unprecedented success throughout Europe makes this interpretative indeterminacy particularly important: the *Oráculo* was read by many more people than any of Gracián's other works, and this is arguably still the case today, meaning that the way in which it is interpreted often becomes representative of 'Gracián's thought', or subsequently clouds the reader's approach to Gracián's other texts. French translators and interpreters of Gracián's works hold an important position in this respect due to the influence they had on European readers in other languages. As Gambin writes, "sabido es que Gracián penetra en Europa a través de Francia" (166). This French influence is most pertinent when it comes to Germany. The links between Gracián and German thinkers, such as Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Friedrich Nietzsche, have received ample critical attention. Less often noted is the dependence of German translators on French translations of Gracián's works, meaning that German versions have often been filtered through a French focus before being assimilated into Germany, or more frequently, have been directly translated into German from the French, bypassing the original Spanish completely. Between 1686 and 1882, Santiago Romero records that there were nine translations into German of Amelot de la Houssaie's French version of the *Oráculo*,

published in 1684, and that there were several more influenced by it (309). In addition, Christian Thomasius, an important figure in the diffusion of Gracián's ideas in Germany, worked from Amelot's French translation of the *Oráculo*, and Johann Leonhard Sauter's German translation of it, to illustrate his lectures at the University of Halle in 1687/8 (Hidalgo-Serna 28).

This means that Gracián's ideas have been refracted through a French filter before reaching many European readers, with the result that the faculty of reason, conceptualised as atemporal and objective, so revered in rationalistic France, is elevated above the faculty of *ingenio*, often coming to efface it completely. Hidalgo-Serna remarks that even a figure as central to Gracián studies as Schopenhauer, who translated the *Oráculo* into German in 1832, “no captó el auténtico valor y el significado del ingenio dentro de la filosofía graciana”, perpetrating instead, “la traslación de este término al ámbito de lo racional” (21). For example, when confronting aphorism two of the *Oráculo*, ‘Genio e ingenio’, Schopenhauer translates the title phrase as ‘Herz und Kopf’ (‘Corazón y mente’) and goes on to use ‘Kopf’ several times throughout the text to refer to *ingenio*. Hidalgo-Serna points out that this translation of *ingenio* associates it with deliberated rationality and renders it synonymous with ‘reason’/*juicio* (38). Furthermore, Schopenhauer often uses a word he has previously used to translate ‘genio’, such as ‘Geist’ or ‘Genie’, to then translate ‘ingenio’ later in the text. This reveals Schopenhauer's conviction that *genio* and *ingenio* represent a mere play on words, and manifests his disregard for the possibility that *ingenio* is a central concept in itself, essential for gaining understanding and placed on a par with reason/*juicio* in Gracián's worldview.<sup>39</sup>

This French filtering of Gracián's ideas, combined with the interpretative indeterminacy already inherent in the original Spanish, means that an image of the world as deceitful and hostile, and an image of man as an isolated and God-like embodiment of divine reason, have proliferated when interpreting the *Oráculo*. These interpretations are not without foundation. The first aphorism of the *Oráculo* sets a pessimistic tone when it states that “más es menester para tratar con un solo hombre en estos tiempos que con todo un pueblo en los pasados” (1, 215), and we soon

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<sup>39</sup> Today, ‘genio’ can be translated into English as ‘genius’ or ‘temperament’. It is therefore understandable that ‘ingenio’, translated into English as ‘ingenuity’, might be conflated by readers such as Schopenhauer, with the idea of ‘genio’/innate ‘genius’. However, as the previous section on *El Discreto* put forward, Gracián's conceptualisation of ‘genio’ is more closely aligned with the English translation of ‘temperament’ and not with that of ‘genius’.

encounter Gracián's assimilation of Plautus' idea of man as a wolf to other men when we read, "milicia es la vida del hombre contra la malicia del hombre" (13, 220).

Gracián's comments that "hay bocas de malevolencia" (86, 254), and "muchas hay que aborrecen de balde, sin saber el cómo ni el porqué" (119, 268) are reminiscent of the one faintly negative *primor* of *El Héroe*, which described people's tendency to find fault in others (XIX). However, what was briefly mentioned in *El Héroe* is taken further in the *Oráculo*, and comes to characterise the entire era in which Gracián finds himself: "floreció en el siglo de oro la llaneza, en éste de yerro la malicia" (210, 314).

In addition, the hostility with which others are described in the *Oráculo* leads to an atmosphere of paranoia and suspicion, which requires an astute awareness of when and when not to give too much away. We read: "el más práctico saber consiste en disimular; lleva riesgo de perder el que juega a juego descubierto" (98, 259), and as a consequence Gracián encourages the adoption of disguise in order to fool others, since, after all, "las cosas no pasan por lo que son, sino por lo que parecen. Valer y saberlo mostrar es valer dos veces. Lo que no se ve es como si no fuese...prevalece el engaño y júzganse las cosas por fuera" (130, 273). Gracián thus encourages the wise man to be always obsessively alert as to how he is perceived by others, stressing, "aquél es varón remirado que mira que le miran o que le mirarán. Sabe que las paredes oyen y que lo mal hecho revienta por salir. Aun cuando solo, obra como a vista de todo el mundo" (297, 346).

The wise man which Gracián describes in the *Oráculo* is not only vigilant in order to protect himself from the slander and malice of others, but is also vigilant in order to gain knowledge about others, and to utilise this knowledge to his own advantage. In this way, what was a benevolent distancing of oneself in order to increase one's understanding of the world in *El Político* and *El Discreto* becomes converted in the *Oráculo* into a Machiavellian-like way of manipulating others. As Avilés too argues, the aim of distancing oneself shifts from that of gaining insight in the former texts, to that of gaining power over others in the latter (163). The underhandedness of this technique is stressed when we read: "observar los genios y templarse al de cada uno; al serio y al jovial, seguirles el corriente, haciendo política transformación" (77, 250). Gracián specifies that this technique "es como tener la llave del querer ajeno" (26, 226), emphasising its furtive nature. Even Gracián's previously positive depiction of companionship is tainted with ulterior motives when

he writes, in reference to friends, that “no sólo se ha de procurar en ellos conseguir el gusto sino la utilidad” (156, 286).

The sense of hostility towards the outside world which the *Oráculo* appears to foster can be seen to culminate in Gracián’s apparent endorsement of interior reason/*juicio*, conceptualised in Cartesian fashion, as the only faculty which can lead to any kind of understanding. This is indicated in the text’s ‘Aprobación’ by Fray Gabriel Hernández, when he describes it as “un espejo de la razón” (210), and in Gracián’s ‘Al lector’, when he states that “sirva éste de memorial a la razón en el banquete de sus sabios” (214). This focus on reason is frequently manifest in references to *synderesis*. For example, we read,

Nácense algunos prudentes; entran con esta ventaja de la *synderesis* connatural en la sabiduría, y así tienen la mitad andada para los aciertos. Con la edad y la experiencia viene a sazonzarse del todo la razón y llegan a un juicio muy templado (60, 241).

And the most developed of these references to *synderesis* occurs in aphorism 96, when it is described as,

El trono de la razón, basa de la prudencia, que en fe de ella cuesta poco el acertar. Es suerte del cielo y la más deseada por primera y por mejor: la primera pieza del arnés, con tal urgencia que ninguna otra que le falte a un hombre le denomina falto; nótase más su menos. Todas las acciones de la vida dependen de su influencia y todas solicitan su calificación, que todo ha de ser con seso. Consiste en una connatural propensión a todo lo más conforme a razón, casándose siempre con lo más acertado (258).

This repeated stress on reason throughout the text makes it easy to carry out a rationalist reading of it, as one which encourages retreat from the external world and elevates interiority as man’s only source of certainty. However, whilst the *Oráculo* provides ample material to support such a rationalist interpretation, it is evident here, through the references to “prudencia” and “la edad y la experiencia”, that the conception of reason being put forward does not align neatly with the rationalistic view of reason as something innate, unchanging, universal, and divine. Rather, Gracián shows it to be a faculty which can be perfected in time through practice, and any interpretation which seeks to claim otherwise runs the risk of disingenuity or anachronism.

Nevertheless, as in *El Discreto*, in the *Oráculo*, Gracián provides ample material to facilitate an introspective and rationalistic interpretation of the text. While in *El Discreto*, the objective distance provided by *juicio*/reason allowed one to rein in one’s *genio*/passions, and complemented the role played by *ingenio*, in the *Oráculo*,

reason can be interpreted to be elevated above it. Gracián encourages the same kind of self-reflection as in *El Discreto* when we read, for example, “es lección de advertencia la reflexión sobre sí: un conocer su disposición actual y prevenirla, y aun decantarse al otro extremo para hallar, entre el natural y el arte, el fiel de la sindéresis” (68, 246). However, in the *Oráculo*, Gracián can be seen to go further by elevating interiority and scorning exteriority when he writes that,

No puede uno ser señor de sí si primero no se comprende. Hay espejos del rostro, no los hay del ánimo: séalo la discreta reflexión sobre sí; y cuando se olvidare de su imagen exterior, conserve la interior para enmendarla, para mejorarla (89, 255).

If one fails to focus on one’s interiority, one’s passions will run wild and this is presented disdainfully as a debasement of man’s interior rationality, the primary faculty that he should strive to purify and embody. This is apparent when Gracián states,

Si es posible, prevenga la prudente reflexión la vulgaridad del ímpetu; no le será dificultoso al que fuere prudente. El primer paso del apasionarse es advertir que se apasiona, que es entrar con señorío del afecto, tanteando la necesidad hasta tal punto de enojo y no más. Con esta superior refleja entre y salga en una ira. Sepa parar bien y a su tiempo, que lo más dificultoso del correr está en el parar. Gran prueba de juicio, conservarse cuerdo en los trances de locura. Todo exceso de pasión degenera de lo racional; pero con esta magistral atención nunca atropellará la razón, ni pisará los términos de la sindéresis (155, 285).

Here, we see that man in a contemplative state of “señorío del afecto”, “superior refleja”, and “magistral atención”, distanced from the exterior world which provokes “trances de locura”, represents the pinnacle of “lo racional”, towards which man should strive. Gracián presents this state as the only one which can lead to epistemological insight and to understanding when he writes, “el apasionado siempre habla con otro lenguaje diferente de lo que las cosas son: habla en él la pasión, no la razón; y cada uno, según su afecto o su humor; y todos muy lejos de la verdad” (273, 337). In other words, only reason/*juicio*, conceptualised as distanced and detached from the world, carries an epistemological function and can lead to understanding. The idea of reason/*juicio* as the only faculty with epistemological worth is reiterated when we read:

Cada uno hace concepto según su conveniencia y abunda de razones en su aprehensión. Cede en los más el dictamen al afecto. Acontece el encontrarse dos contradictoriamente y cada uno presume de su parte la razón; más ella, fiel, nunca supo hacer dos caras (294, 345).

Reason, in other words, can settle disputes by its ability to provide universal and atemporal knowledge. This conception of knowledge as unchanging and static

contrasts with the intertwining of understanding with aesthetic experience, resulting in *admiración* and depending upon novelty, which *ingenio* has been shown to provide in *El Héroe* and *El Discreto*.

Not only can we interpret reason/*juicio* as the only faculty worth revering, and the sole faculty which man should strive to embody, due to the self-control and self-containment that it offers; it also carries the advantage of leading to control over the perception of others. For example, we read,

Son las pasiones los humores del ánimo y cualquier exceso en ellas causa indisposición de cordura; y si el mal saliere a la boca, peligrará la reputación. Sea, pues, tan señor de sí y tan grande, que ni en lo más próspero, ni en lo más adverso pueda alguno censurarle perturbado, sí admirarle superior (52, 238).

Here, Gracián describes the way in which “las pasiones”, against which reason/*juicio* work tirelessly, lead to an “indisposición de cordura”, which can, in turn, lead to the ruin of one’s “reputación”. Reason/*juicio*, in its ability to temper the passions, therefore plays a role in the way in which man is perceived by others and the extent to which he is “superior” over them. Similarly, Gracián later states,

No obre por sí quien no está en sí y la pasión siempre destierra la razón. Sustituya entonces un tercero prudente, que lo será, si desapasionado: siempre ven más los que miran que los que juegan, porque no se apasionan. En conociéndose alterado, toque a retirar la cordura porque no acaba en encendérsele la sangre, que todo lo ejecutará sangriento, y en poco rato dará materia para muchos días de confusión suya y murmuración ajena (287, 342).

This focus on rational man as a distanced figure who steps back and observes, who is concerned with “reputación” and “murmuración ajena”, and who strives to control these in order to be “superior”, is summarised in the statement: “sea uno primero señor de sí y lo será después de los otros” (55, 239). This can be, and has been, interpreted to show that Gracián’s ideal man is a cold, detached, God-like, Machiavellian, and rationalistic figure, who cultivates superiority in order to manipulate those around him whilst remaining as distanced from the world as possible.

Whilst there is no denying that it is possible to interpret the *Oráculo* as a text which puts forward a picture of the world as a hostile place, where nothing is as it appears, and in which man must aspire to embody divine reason in order to temper his passions, protect his reputation, and gain control over others, it is also true that this is not the only picture that Gracián presents in this text. As in his earlier works, an image of Gracián’s ideal man as wholly engaged with the world, interested in others,

concerned about perfecting social interaction, and focused on the particularities of contingent circumstances emerges. For example, despite the focus on introspection which has already been demonstrated, Gracián also highlights the importance of other people to his ideal man's wellbeing. He states, "las más de las cosas dependen de la satisfacción ajena. Es la estimación para las perfecciones lo que el favonio para las flores: aliento y vida" (67, 244), and similarly, "lo más y lo mejor que tenemos depende de respeto ajeno. Conténtanse algunos con tener la razón de su parte, pero no basta, que es menester ayudarla con la diligencia" (226, 317). We therefore see that Gracián is not only concerned with the cultivation of reputation towards the end of manipulating others, but that making oneself agreeable to others is also a pleasure in itself which man cannot live without. This is particularly highlighted when Gracián writes,

Antes loco con todos, que cuerdo a solas, dicen políticos, que si todos lo son, con ninguno se perderá; y si es sola la cordura, será tenida por locura: tanto importará seguir la corriente. Es el mayor saber a veces no saber, o afectar no saber. Hase de vivir con otros y los ignorantes son los más. Para vivir a solas ha de tener o mucho de Dios o todo de bestia (133, 274).

Gracián here stresses the necessity that man learn to live amongst others, rather than choosing to isolate himself in disdain of the external world. He thus endorses the idea that man is not naturally disposed to live detached from the world in a contemplative and God-like fashion. The importance of other people in the *Oráculo* is stressed further through Gracián's praise of friendship, as in his earlier texts. He writes, "no hay desierto como vivir sin amigos. La amistad multiplica los bienes y reparte los males, es único remedio contra la adversa fortuna y un desahogo del alma" (158, 287), and he encourages his ideal man to keep his doors open to potential friendship (147, 281), even from former enemies (217, 313).

Furthermore, within the *Oráculo*, Gracián repeatedly encourages his wise man to embrace reality, rather than turn away from it, and expresses the idea that man should learn to temper his expectations by not holding reality up to an unattainable ideal, which only leads to disappointment and a scornful attitude towards it. He states that,

Pero no se ha de hacer profesión de desagradarse de todo, que es uno de los necios extremos y más odiosa cuando por afectación que por destemplanza. Quisiera algunos que criara Dios otro mundo y otras perfecciones para satisfacción de su extravagante fantasía (65, 244).

In this way, Gracián shows that the world as it is, rather than the ideal concept of the world that man may have inside his head, is the best of all possible worlds, and that he should engage with it regardless of its imperfections. This idea is also manifest when he states,

Por grandes que sean las exelencias no bastan a satisfacer el concepto y, como le hallan engañado con la exorbitante expectación, más presto le desengañan que le admiran. La esperanza es gran falsificador de la verdad: corríjala la cordura, procurando que sea superior la fruición al deseo (19, 223).

Accepting the world as it is is important because the consequence of doing otherwise renders one disagreeable and unlikeable to others. For this reason, as in *El Héroe*, Gracián stresses the importance of gaining the good will of other people, writing, “hacer bien a todas manos, buenas palabras y mejores obras, amar para ser amado. La cortesía es el mayor hechizo político de grandes personajes” (40, 233), and this is reiterated when he states that “es la cortesía la principal parte de la cultura, especie de hechizo, y así concilia la gracia de todos, así como descortesía el desprecio y enfado universal” (118, 267). Gracián therefore shows that the ideal man of the *Oráculo* orients himself within reality, shows respect and courtesy towards others, and is not suspicious or hostile towards the world.

As we have seen, Gracián places a certain stress on the idea of distancing oneself from the world in the *Oráculo*, and this can indeed be interpreted as a disdainful rejection of exteriority, in rationalistic fashion. However, as in his earlier works, there is also evidence that this distancing serves the aim of gaining objectivity, observing, learning, and acquiring wisdom about the world which will help inform subsequent interactions with it by differentiating between *ser* and *parecer*. As Gracián warns, “hombre sin noticias, mundo a oscuras” (4, 216). The world is a difficult place to decipher because “hay sujetos de sola fachata”, who “tienen la entrada de palacio y de choza la habitación” (48, 236), making it difficult to analyse a person or a situation from surface appearances alone. As such, man must attempt to decipher the truth behind appearances: “hállanse de ordinario ser muy otras las cosas de lo que parecían y la ignorancia que no pasó de la corteza se convierte en desengaño cuando se penetra al interior” (146, 280). Gracián advises distanced observation in order to achieve this insight: “acude la observación entendiendo su perspicacia y descubre las tinieblas revestidas de la luz; descrifra la intención, más solapada cuanto más sencilla” (13, 221). In distancing oneself and taking a step back

in order to observe and learn, Gracián's ideal man is able to become a “gran descifrador de la más recatada interioridad” (49, 237) with “un práctico saber de todo lo corriente” (22, 224). We therefore see that, as in his earlier works, Gracián does not, simply, encourage an introspective and contemplative retreat from the world in rationalistic fashion, but encourages the adoption of a certain distance from one's surroundings in order to gain practical understanding which can then be applied to the world.

This stress on the practical nature of the knowledge that Gracián advocates is highlighted when he states that “hasta el saber ha de ser al uso y donde no se usa es preciso saber hacer del ignorante” (120, 268). The danger of cultivating any other type of knowledge is that one will be very wise in subliminal and metaphysical matters, but will be easy to fool in worldly ones:

No todo sea especulación, haya también acción. Los muy sabios son fáciles de engañar porque, aunque saben lo extraordinario, ignoran lo ordinario del vivir, que es más preciso. La contemplación de las cosas sublimes no les da lugar para las manuales (232, 320).

Due to this, Avilés argues that Gracián writes a “secular ethics for those desiring success in the world, and he is not concerned with other-worldly matters” (161), a point of view shared by Cantarino (37). However, we have seen that the *Oráculo* can easily be interpreted otherwise, as a text which endorses the cultivation of ‘pure’ knowledge via detached contemplation.

Cuartero and Ayala shed light on how these two interpretations can function alongside each other. Ayala highlights that Baroque man, in general “vive la tensión surgida entre lo divino y lo humano” (2001: 27), and Cuartero specifies that the Jesuits, in particular, experienced with “especial intensidad”, “la relación entre medios humanos y divinos” (97). This means that the tensions in the *Oráculo* between other-worldliness and this-worldliness, between detachment from the world and engagement with it, ultimately stem from the tension felt by the Jesuits between the earthly and the divine. This chapter has already outlined, through the Christian paradox of the coexistence of free will and Fortune/Providence, the way in which the adoption of a Christian position leads, of necessity, to contradiction in one's thinking. Gracián's mental tussle between “medios humanos y divinos” is evident in the *Oráculo* when he repeats the words of San Ignacio de Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, which summarise the tension at the heart of Jesuit thinking, and at the heart of Christian thinking more generally: “hanse de procurar los medios humanos como si

no hubiese divinos y los divinos como si no hubiese humanos” (251, 328). As a result of this tension, Gracián, at times, encourages the cultivation of a detached, God-like, contemplative approach towards life, and at other times, encourages an engaged and practical approach. This contradiction is uncomfortable for Gracián’s reader, which is why many interpreters, particularly French ones, have opted to stress one side of this tension while largely disregarding the existence of the other.

Whilst the tension between the conception of man as self-contained and introverted, or engaged with the world and extroverted becomes particularly, and perhaps unexpectedly, pronounced in the *Oráculo*, the issue of whether man needs high birth and good Fortune in order to be successful develops pleasingly upon the trajectory already set out in Gracián’s earlier works. Gracián makes several comments which would lead us to believe in the necessity of good Fortune, such as when he describes “reyes por mérito y leones por privilegio innato” (42, 234), or when he claims that “nacieron unos más dichosos que otros: aquéllos para hacer bien y éstos para recibirle” (286, 342). However, these remarks are much more sparse than in his earlier works. Instead, the idea that man can work hard to improve his Fortune dominates. This is clearly set out at the beginning of the text when Lastanosa writes in his ‘Dedicatoria’: “no tanto solicita este *Oráculo* prudencial al amparo de Vuestra Exelencia cuanto su autoridad; no la fortuna, aunque grande, sino el merecimiento, que es mayor” (213). And this is repeated by Gracián within the body of the text, much like in *El Discreto*, when we read, for example,

No se nace hecho: vase cada día perfeccionando, en la persona, en el empleo, hasta llegar al punto del consumado ser, al complemento de prendas, de eminencias. Conocerse ha en el realzado del gusto, purificado del ingenio, en lo maduro del juicio, en lo defecado de la voluntad (6, 217).

The idea of man as a perfectible being is then repeated extensively throughout the rest of the text (see, for example, 21, 224; 87, 254; 106, 262; and 199, 305).

With this shift away from the necessity of innate and predetermined good Fortune, and as the full title of the *Oráculo* indicates, the idea of prudence has finally come to take centre stage in Gracián’s scheme on how to attain success. He expresses this in the same way as in *El Discreto* in *realce XII* when he describes the two doors of the house of Fortune: “si se entra por la puerta del placer, se sale por la del pesar, y al contrario. Atención, pues, al acabar, poniendo más cuidado en la felicidad de la salida que en el aplauso de la entrada” (59, 240). This shows, once again, that for

Gracián, worldly success is not an end in itself and that his focus is always directed towards the possibility for man to attain success upon death. The link between the prudential approach to success and virtue, hinted at briefly in *El Héroe* (primor XX) and *El Discreto* (realce XI), comes to the fore in the *Oráculo*, manifest when we read, “pero, bien filosofado, no hay otro arbitrio sino el de la virtud y atención, porque no hay más dicha ni más desdicha que prudencia o imprudencia” (21, 224). If prudence requires man to learn constantly from past experience and to apply this knowledge to situations in the present, then virtue acts as an “arbitrio”, requiring him to make the morally correct judgement each time. Each instance in which prudence is applied is a renewed test of man’s virtue. This means that virtue is not something which is innate, static, or granted by good Fortune. Rather, it must be constantly refreshed, and man must prove his moral worth repeatedly throughout his life. In this respect, prudence and virtue function very much in the same way as *ingenio*, as it was elaborated in *El Discreto*. Just as the function of *ingenio* is to reconfigure things already known in order to reveal awareness of universal Truth in a novel way, in aesthetic fashion, the function of prudence is to reconfigure man’s past experiences in order to reveal the virtuous course of action in the present. In this way, prudence is a form of *ingenio* and acting virtuously is a form of actualised and contingent Truth. As González Roldán and Cuartero both also point out, this transposition of *ingenio* to the realm of morality via the concept of prudence represents one of Gracián’s most original contributions, supplementing the ontological, epistemological, and aesthetic functions which it already carries (214 and 93, respectively), and this will be examined in more detail through an analysis of *El Criticón* in chapter five.

The prime importance of virtue in Gracián’s worldview is summarised in the final aphorism of the text, which reads,

En una palabra, santo, que es decirlo todo de una vez. Es la virtud cadena de todas las perfecciones, centro de las felicidades. Ella hace un sujeto prudente, atento, sagaz, cuerdo, sabio, valeroso, reportado, entero, feliz, plausible, verdadero y universal héroe. Tres eses hacen dichoso: santo, sano y sabio. La virtud es el sol del mundo menor y tiene por hemisferio la buena conciencia; es tan hermosa que se lleva la gracia de Dios y de las gentes. No hay cosa amable sino la virtud, ni aborrecible, sino el vicio. La virtud es cosa de veras, todo lo demás de burlas. La capacidad y grandeza se ha de medir por la virtud, no por la fortuna. Ella sola se basta a sí misma. Vivo el hombre, le hace amable; y muerto, memorable” (300, 348).

With this aphorism, the final words of the text, we come to appreciate the way in which virtue allows Gracián to reconcile the dualities between the worldly and the other-worldly, between the “humano” and the “divino”: in order to refresh one’s

virtue one must constantly test it against circumstances in the real world, meaning that man must be actively engaged with his surroundings. However, while virtue is largely its own reward during life (90, 256), its ability to make man “santo”, its status as “la gracia de Dios”, and its ability to render man “memorable” after death (see also: 90, 256) mean that it also serves a function beyond the purely worldly. Rather, virtue holds a more other-worldly function as Gracián’s answer to the mystery of how man can combat the oblivion of death. For this reason, he writes,

En el cielo todo es contento, en el infierno todo es pesar. En el mundo, como en medio, uno y otro; estamos entre dos extremos y así participa de entrambos. Altéranse las suertes: no todo ha de ser felicidad, ni todo adversidad. Este mundo es un cero: a solas vale nada; juntándolo con el cielo, mucho. La indiferencia a su variedad es cordura, ni es de sabios la novedad. Vase empeñando nuestra vida como en comedia; al fin viene a desenredarse: atención, pues, al acabar bien (211, 310).

Here, the uncomfortable, and seemingly irreconcilable, contradiction in Gracián’s thought between the worldly and the other-worldly, the human and the divine, “adversidad” and “felicidad” is addressed: a rationalistic retreat from the world holds no meaning without a world from which to retreat, in the same way that living morally, implementing prudence, and cultivating virtue in the world hold no meaning without another world after death in which these are rewarded: “este mundo es un cero: a solas vale nada”. Gracián thus reveals his characteristically Jesuit, dual focus on “los medios humanos” and “los medios divinos” (251, 328): he offers worldly advice, whilst never taking his eye off other-worldly concerns (“atención, pues, al acabar bien”), and he is fully committed to engagement with the world, whilst never forgetting that, eventually, man will no longer have a place there.

The *Oráculo* is therefore an interesting text in many ways: in its stress on friendship, interaction with others, and observation in order to acquire wisdom about the world it reiterates points made in Gracián’s earlier texts. In the status it grants to prudence and virtue, in contrast to predetermined good Fortune, it also culminates the gradual shift in Gracián’s earlier works, from a conception of success as innate, to a conception of it as attainable through hard work. However, the *Oráculo* is also surprisingly different to Gracián’s earlier works in the emphasis it places on the hostility and malice of the world, and the necessity that man learn to manipulate his own *parecer*, and to read the *parecer* of others, in order to advance himself. The two sides that Gracián reveals of himself in the *Oráculo* are somewhat incompatible and only manage to sit alongside each other with relative ease due to the text’s disjointed

and aphoristic form. Given the success of the *Oráculo*, and its wide diffusion throughout Europe, influenced particularly by rationalistic French translators, the pessimistic side of Gracián's thoughts has often been granted more attention than it truly deserves, given the lack of any such negativity in *El Héroe*, *El Político*, and *El Discreto*.

There is a sense in which the aphoristic form of the *Oráculo* has contributed to its success amongst those who seek to carry out a rationalistic reading of it, and has thus led to reductive interpretations of the text, as one which advocates a rejection of the external world and the cultivation of pure reason as the only source of understanding for man. This is because, as both Avilés and Cascardi have argued, in extricating his advice from his original texts – *El Héroe*, *El Político*, *El Discreto*, and perhaps too, *El Varón Atento*, and *El Galante* – Gracián also extricates it from its original context (164 and 275, respectively). This means that the voice of the *Oráculo* is somewhat transcendent and lacking in particularity, like the voice of divine reason. Avilés points out that this kind of voice is precisely what Kant aims for when constructing his system of ethics (153) and Cascardi compares it to the disembodied voice of Descartes' *Méditations* (275). Given the emphasis that Gracián places on particularity and on individual circumstances in the *Oráculo*, as we have seen in the preceding analysis, we can immediately appreciate how incongruous a disembodied, universal, and God-like voice is, and the ways in which this may have led to the proliferation of rationalistic interpretations of the text.

### *Conclusion*

Through an analysis of the treatises we can gain an insight into the way in which Gracián's thought changed, fluctuated, and developed during the first decade of his literary career, from 1637 to 1647. This allows us to apply nuance to an era of his thinking of which the *Oráculo* alone is largely considered representative. This chapter has shown how misguided this reliance on the *Oráculo* is as a source of 'Gracián's thought'. By addressing three primary debates – whether Gracián recommends a Machiavellian approach to the world, or whether he stresses the cultivation of virtue; whether Gracián recommends that man be God-like and detached from the world, or whether he encourages engagement with one's surroundings and with others; and whether Gracián views good Fortune and noble

birth as a prerequisite for success, or whether he believes that hard work and the implementation of prudence can improve man's fate – this chapter has challenged the common misunderstandings of Gracián's treatises as, firstly, Machiavellian, in their advocacy of a cunning and ruthless approach to success and, secondly, rationalistic, in their advocacy of a retreat into the self and a scornful rejection of the external world in the search for some form of certain understanding.

Whilst these three debates have provided a framework with which to begin an analysis of Gracián's works, there are three primary developments within the treatises which will go on to be expanded in the *Agudeza* and in *El Criticón*. Firstly, the brief insights which Gracián gives into the nature of *ingenio*, primarily in *El Héroe* and *El Discreto*, allow us to appreciate the epistemological role this faculty plays, as an equal partner to reason/*juicio* in the acquisition of understanding. Secondly, the evolution of Gracián's views concerning good Fortune/Providence and hard work/free will in the determination of man's fate, which develops gradually throughout all of the treatises and culminates in the *Oráculo*, allows us to appreciate the emerging centrality of prudence and virtue in Gracián's worldview. Thirdly, Gracián's contradictory nature, evident in all of the treatises, allows us to appreciate that he was grappling with the debates of his time between the various competing dualities outlined in the previous chapter (the worldly and the other-worldly, the particular and the universal, the moral and the metaphysical, and the practical and the contemplative), but also that he was simultaneously grappling with the paradox essential to Christianity between the human and the divine, which was felt particularly strongly by the Jesuits. Whilst interpretations from either side of these dualities is possible, in the course of the treatises, Gracián demonstrates a predominantly reconciliatory spirit towards them and this syncretic approach will go on to characterise his later works too.

### Chapter Four: *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*

The *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* of 1648 is a revised version of Gracián's *Arte de ingenio, tratado de la agudeza*, published in 1642. Despite the considerable amplification of the 1648 version, there is very little change in doctrine between the two texts, and this chapter will use the revised, 1648 version as the basis of its analysis. The original *Arte de ingenio* appeared after the publication of *El Héroe* (1637) and *El Político* (1640) and before the publication of *El Discreto* (1646) and the *Oráculo* (1647). The reworked *Agudeza* appeared two years after the publication of *El Discreto* and one year after the publication of the *Oráculo*. The contents of the *Arte de ingenio* were therefore present in Gracián's mind throughout the production of *El Discreto* and the *Oráculo*, and it is likely that his revision of this text took place alongside the writing of these latter treatises too. The fact that Gracián carried out a revision of the *Arte de ingenio* suggests that its contents were, firstly, important enough to him to revisit and, secondly, unsatisfactorily expressed in the first instance.<sup>40</sup> Whatever Gracián's motivations for reworking the *Arte de ingenio* may have been, it is the case that even after revising it, the text did not achieve the same success as his other works, as evidenced by the translation history of Gracián's works throughout Europe.

In France, all of Gracián's works have been translated except the *Arte de ingenio*, and the *Agudeza* only appeared in French translation in 1983. In England, all of Gracián's works, except *El Político* have been translated (although *El Criticón* was only translated partially in 1681 by Paul Rycout, and the English translation of the *Agudeza* is a 1962 PhD thesis by Leland Chambers which remains unpublished). In Italy, all of Gracián's works were translated between 1670 and 1713, except the *Agudeza*, which was finally translated in 1986. And in Germany, all of Gracián's works except *El Héroe* and the *Agudeza* have been translated.<sup>41</sup> In fact, the *Agudeza* is the only work by Gracián which was not translated into any language, and published, until 1983 (Pérez Lasheras 72). This pattern is reflected in Spain, where

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<sup>40</sup> The 1648 *Agudeza* includes many translations by Manuel de Salinas y Lizana of Martial's epigrams which were not included in the original *Arte de ingenio*. Guardiola-Alcóver has suggested that, since Salinas y Lizana was a cousin of Vincencio Juan de Lastanosa, the motivation behind Gracián's revision, and inclusion of these translations, may have been to pay homage to the family of his long-time patron (118).

<sup>41</sup> This information has been summarised from Hidalgo-Serna (18–21).

the *Agudeza* and the *Arte de ingenio* were not reedited after their initial publications until the twentieth century. When we compare this general neglect of the *Agudeza* with the editorial success of *El Héroe* and the *Oráculo*, in Spain and beyond, as outlined in the previous chapter, it becomes clear that the *Agudeza* failed to reach the same level of popularity as many of Gracián's other works. Given that the *Agudeza* is the text in which Gracián outlines his ideas of *ingenio*, of the *concepto*, and of *agudeza* itself, it follows that readers' lack of engagement with it has inevitably led to a lack of understanding, or to a misunderstanding, of the centrality of these elements in Gracián's thought and of how they function.

The importance of taking the time to understand *ingenio*, the *concepto*, and *agudeza* is stressed by Sarmiento when he states that,

The conceit, and the whole attitude implied by the conceit, is a thing that has to be understood, and approached sympathetically if the Spanish mind and language are to be known at all. For the conceit and the conceptist art, and, if one may call it so, the conceptist mentality are an essential aspect of Spain (2008: 423).

Gracián, too, acknowledges that the “conceptist mentality” is uniquely Spanish when he writes in his ‘Al lector’ to the *Agudeza*: “si frecuento los españoles, es porque la agudeza prevalece en ellos, así como la erudición en los franceses, la elocuencia en los italianos y la invención en los griegos” (11). As such, and in agreement with Juan Huarte de San Juan's theorising in the *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias*, Gracián explicitly highlights that there are national dispositions which lead to different ways of approaching the world (Zárate Ruiz 113–5), with the implication that failing to understand *agudeza* will lead to a failure to understand the Spanish and their thinking.

Blanco points out that Voltaire, in the ‘Art dramatique’ article of the *Dictionnaire philosophique*, outlines the opposition between the Spanish mentality and that of the French by describing the former with derision and disparagement as “tout ingénieux...quelque grandeur qu'ils aient dans l'esprit” (73). We therefore see that *ingenio* was considered, by both Spaniards themselves and by foreign commentators, to be associated with an inherently Spanish way of viewing and synthesising the world. Furthermore, as Voltaire here demonstrates, this Spanish way of approaching the world is often treated with disdain. The previous chapter discussed, in relation to the *Oráculo*, the important influence that the filter of French Rationalism had for the assimilation of Gracián's works throughout Europe, particularly through the popularity of Amelot de la Houssaie's French translation of

the *Oráculo*, which was often the primary channel via which many French and German thinkers accessed Gracián's thinking. The existence of conflicting national, philosophical temperaments, the tendency of France to elevate a Cartesian version of objective reason, the lack of success of Gracián's *Agudeza*, and the success of French translations of Gracián's works, all lead to the probable conclusion that the faculty of *ingenio*, as an alternative conceptualisation of reason and as a tool in the armour of understanding, has not been well diffused by translators or understood by readers, both Spanish and foreign.

On one hand, the general neglect of the *Agudeza* is not surprising: Gracián's versions of *ingenio*, the *concepto*, and *agudeza* are difficult to conceptualise and even more difficult to express in words. On the other hand, their centrality to Gracián's thinking cannot be overemphasised, meaning that an attempt to understand them is essential in order to understand Gracián's works, both before the *Agudeza* and after, particularly *El Criticón* and *El Comulgatorio*. This chapter will aim to shed light on these elements of Gracián's thought. To do so, it will, firstly, discuss the readers' misplaced expectation that *agudeza* function as a rhetorical device and will show, through an analysis of the term 'concepto', that *agudeza* and the *concepto* instead function as a link between the realms of *ser* and *parecer*, and lead to the intuitive, spontaneous, and transient perception and expression of universal insight. This means that their remit lies primarily within ontology and epistemology, and not within rhetoric. Secondly, this chapter will examine the nature of this epistemological knowledge, aligning it with temporary and transient aesthetic experience and not with an objective and atemporal notion of universal Truth. Finally, the chapter will close by examining 1.II of *El Criticón*, in which Gracián demonstrates clearly the way in which *ingenio*, the *concepto*, and *agudeza* function, reflecting back upon the seeds of this scene within the *Agudeza*.

### *Defining the 'Concepto': From Rhetoric to Ontology and Epistemology*

The titles of both versions of the text, *Arte de ingenio, tratado de la agudeza* and *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*, show Gracián playing with his readers' expectations. In the seventeenth century 'arte', 'art', referred to a group of rules governing a skill and would have provoked the expectation of a systematic, scientific, and definitive analysis based upon rational precepts, along the lines of Horace's *Ars Poetica* or Lope

de Vega's *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo*, for example (Blanco 23; Grady 35). *Ingenio*, on the other hand, was commonly taken to mean innate genius, granted upon birth and unsuitable for being taught or acquired. This creates an immediate paradox for the reader of the time, challenging both the idea that any rational 'arte' can conclusively and atemporally define the bounds of its subject matter, and the idea that *ingenio* cannot be learned and developed through practice (Andersen 2008: 224). In *discurso II* of the *Agudeza* Gracián gives an indication of how these two terms can coincide: "privilegio es de ciencia reducir a principios generales su enseñanza. Son las máximas doctrinales lo que el nombre dice, cabezas y como fuentes del discurrir, los fundamentos del enseñar" (40). For Gracián, the headings and subsections which characterise works of science do not function when applied to his subject matter of *agudeza*. Rather, he outlines the idea that the subsections and *discursos* of the *Agudeza* represent general guidelines which serve as mere points of departure. When applied to the real world, further consideration of contingent circumstances is needed. This commingling of universal precepts with particular circumstances entails infinite variety, precluding conclusiveness and therefore preparing the reader of the *Agudeza* for a certain level of indeterminacy, at odds with what the contemporary reader may have expected of the text's title of 'arte'.

This is demonstrated by the way in which Gracián makes a superficial attempt to classify the different types of *agudeza* into groups in *discurso III*. This charade of definitive classification suggests to the scholastically educated reader, accustomed to treatises on classical rhetoric, such as Cicero's *Topica*, that the *Agudeza* will go on to be structured according to these classifications. However, Gracián's initial classifications soon begin to subdivide, he offers new classifications without clarity as to whether these override previous ones or not, and it is unclear whether the headings of the sixty *discursos* which follow conform with any of the classifications which have been offered. For example, Gracián first distinguishes between "agudeza de perspicacia" and "agudeza de artificio" (31). He then subdivides "agudeza de artificio" into "agudeza de concepto", "agudeza verbal", and "agudeza de acción" (31–2). He goes on to offer three alternative categorisations with no indication of how these align with the earlier one or with each other: "agudeza de correspondencia y conformidad" and "agudeza de contrariedad o discordancia" (32–4); "agudeza pura" and "agudeza mixta" (35); and "agudeza incompleja" and "agudeza compuesta" (37).

“Agudeza incompleja” is then subdivided into “agudeza de correlación y conveniencia”, “agudeza de ponderación juiciosa”, “agudeza de raciocinación”, and “agudeza de invención” (38–9). While the usual result of classification is clarity as to the structure of the work to follow, the reader of *discurso III* of the *Agudeza* is left with the sentiment that the underlying coherence of the work has somehow eluded them, supporting the idea that Gracián’s intention in theorising upon *agudeza* is to repudiate conclusiveness and to proliferate variety.

Nevertheless, Gracián’s inclusion of the word ‘arte’ in his title, his façade of logical classification, and his use of the lexicon and argumentation of classical rhetoric (see, for example, *discursos VI, VIII, XIV, XXXVI, XXXVII*) lends the *Agudeza* a “scholastic cast”, which likely created the impression of familiar territory for its contemporary readers (May 1950: 29). However, by conforming to the familiar in some ways, through language and style of argumentation, and by subverting it in others, through the rejection of structural coherence, it could be argued that Gracián deviated too far from the norm, resulting in the text’s lack of popularity: theories of rhetoric were abundant during the Renaissance and it is understandable that a scholastically educated reader should want to avoid what they perceive as a badly written one. Likewise, if taken as a theory book, the *Agudeza* is also lacking: most theorising takes place in *discurso II* and *discurso III*, and each *discurso* tends to open with one or two lines of explanation; beyond this, the text proliferates with examples of *agudeza* with very little substantial comment alongside. The text’s “scholastic cast” can also be alienating for the modern reader, for whom the rhetorical tradition represents “a largely forgotten but intricate body of lore” (Grady 36). Menéndez Pelayo, for example, describes the *Agudeza* as Gracián’s worst work (886), and as “un tratado de preceptiva literaria, cuyo error consiste en haber reducido todas las calidades del estilo a una sola” (883). Hidalgo-Serna also summarises: “su agudeza ha sido interpretada como simple juego de palabras, y en su noción de ingenio fue vista sólo la fuente del ornato puramente formal” (27). Were the *Agudeza* to be contributing anything beyond badly articulated rhetorical theory in its deliberation of *agudeza* and *ingenio*, as this chapter will presently argue, it has certainly been missed by most of its readers.

The erroneous supposition here is that the *Agudeza* is a book of rhetorical theory and that *agudeza* itself is nothing more than a rhetorical, stylistic device. This supposition is revealed to be incorrect upon close reading of the text, in which

Gracián repeatedly points out that there is indeed a relation between rhetoric and *agudeza* but that the latter is not subsumed into the former. For example, he writes,

Siempre ha de haber alguna circunstancia especial en que se funde la conformidad de los términos para levantar la comparación conceptuosa: que sin ésta no será sutileza sino una desnuda figura retórica sin viveza de ingenio (XIV, 159).

Here Gracián identifies particular circumstances (rather than universal precepts), the *concepto*, and *ingenio* as facets which can transform and elevate “una desnuda figura retórica” into something more nuanced.

Son los tropos y figuras retóricas materia y como fundamento para que sobre ellos levante sus primores la agudeza; y lo que la retórica tiene por formalidad, esta nuestra arte por materia sobre que echa la esmalte de su artificio (XX, 223).

Again, *agudeza* is described as something which elevates “los tropos y figuras retóricas”, which are described as the “materia” with which *agudeza* works. *Agudeza* builds upon the “fundamento” of rhetoric, adding to it “la esmalte de su artificio”, indicating its artful and deliberated nature.

Tiene la agudeza también sus argumentos: que si en los dialécticos reina la eficacia, en los retóricos la elocuencia, en éstos la belleza (XXXVI, 417).

While rhetoric concerns itself with eloquent expression, Gracián here points out that the primary concern of *agudeza* is with “belleza”, introducing the idea that the remit of *agudeza* extends beyond the realm of witty expression into the realm of the aesthetic (examined in more detail later in this chapter).

Cífranse en este discurso muchas otras especies de sutileza, repitiendo siempre que la agudeza tiene por materia y por fundamento muchas de las figuras retóricas, pero dales la forma y realce del concepto (L, 515).

Gracián repeats the idea that “las figuras retóricas” provide the “materia” and “fundamento” for *agudeza* to take place, but that *agudeza* elevates these by giving them the “forma y realce” of the *concepto*, again indicating that *agudeza* and the *concepto* produce something more transcendent than rhetoric alone.

No es de esencia de la agudeza fingida el metro y composición poética, sino ornato que la prosa suele suplir con su aliñada cultura. No está la eminencia en la cantidad de sílabas, ni en la cadencia dellas: que eso es muy material, no pasa del oído; sí en la sutileza del pensar, en la elegancia del decir, en en artificio del discurrir, en la profundidad del declarar (LV, 571).

Here a distinction is drawn between the formal nature of “el metro”, the “composición”, “la cantidad de sílabas” and “la cadencia dellas” in poetry, which do not go beyond “el oído”, and the “aliñada cultura”, “la sutileza del pensar”, “la elegancia del decir”, the “artificio del discurrir” and “la profundidad del declarar” of prose, the latter of which manage to penetrate beyond sense experience into a seemingly deeper part of man’s intellect.

Dos cosas hacen perfectos un estilo: lo material de las palabras y lo formal de los pensamientos, que de ambas eminencias se adecua su perfección. Conténtanse unos con sola la alma de la agudeza, sin atender a la bizarría del exprimirla; antes tienen por felicidad la facilidad del decir, aun en la poesía (LX, 608).

Gracián differentiates between “las palabras” which express an idea, rhetoric, and “los pensamientos” behind an idea, the *agudeza*. When rhetoric and *agudeza* work together they achieve “perfección”. As such, perfect “estilo” is composed of a delicate balance between surface appearance and soul, between the manner of expression and the ideas behind what is being expressed, and between form and content.

Son los conceptos vida del estilo, espíritu del decir, y tanto tiene de perfección cuanto de sutileza; mas cuando se juntan lo realzado del estilo y lo remontado del concepto, hacen la obra cabal (LX, 609).

Again, the difference between soul and style is emphasised, with the *concepto* shown to play a pivotal role in the “vida” and “espíritu” behind rhetoric. When style is combined with “lo remontado del concepto” the result is “la obra cabal”: perfect expression which reconciles style with substance, form with content, and rhetoric with *agudeza*.

From these examples a picture begins to emerge of the way in which Gracián conceptualises *agudeza*, the *concepto*, and *ingenio*: they function within the remit of particular circumstances, which is why they cannot be theorised upon in the same atemporal manner as typical treatises on classical rhetoric; they elevate rhetoric, imbuing it with more nuance and profundity; they are associated with artifice, meaning that they are the product of purposeful deliberation (and not just of innate ingenuity); their purpose lies within the realm of Beauty and aesthetic experience; and they work alongside rhetoric to produce a perfect balance between expression and thought, form and content.

Andersen sums up her observations on Gracián's differentiation between rhetoric and *agudeza* by concluding that, for Gracián, rhetoric refers to the exterior expression of language, whilst *agudeza* refers to the content and to the relation between expression and content (2008: 162). If we translate this to the language of seventeenth-century Spain, we can say that rhetoric refers to the *parecer* of language, whilst *agudeza* and the *concepto* refer to its *ser*, and to the relation between *ser* and *parecer*. The reason why this is difficult to conceptualise is because *agudeza* and the *concepto* do not simply pertain to the realm of *ser*, whilst rhetoric pertains to that of *parecer*; *agudeza* and the *concepto* pertain to the realm of *ser* as well as to the less neatly conceptualised linkage between the realms of *ser* and *parecer*, two realms which are often thought of as completely distinct and irreconcilable. In other words, they connect the worldly realm, that of *parecer*, with the more other-worldly realm of *ser*. The reconciliatory role played by *agudeza*, the *concepto*, and *ingenio* between the realms of *ser* and *parecer* is what makes them critical to an understanding of Gracián's ontology, but it is also what makes them conceptually difficult.

Sarmiento's analysis of the *Agudeza* serves as a good example of critics' tendency to approach *agudeza* as a rhetorical device, and of the frustration which results from the inevitable realisation that *agudeza* functions beyond the realm of stylistic expression, through the reconciliatory role it plays between the realms of *ser* and *parecer*, and of the frustration which results from the difficulty of articulating how this reconciliatory role between the worldly and the other-worldly functions. The focus of Sarmiento's article is on examining the extent to which we can differentiate between the conceit (the *concepto*) and the simile, meaning that he approaches his analysis of *agudeza* through the lens of its relation to an already established rhetorical device. In doing so, he disputes Gracián's famous definition of the *concepto*, claiming that this cannot define the conceit for the reason that the essence of the conceit lies in its prolongation and therefore has not truly started at the moment of Gracián's definition (285). Sarmiento also disagrees with Gracián that a conceit can take the form of narrative fiction, arguing that the moment in which the conceit is apprehended must be rapid, ruling out the possibility that an extended text, read over time, can be called a conceit (427). As such, Sarmiento argues that the conceit must be more prolonged than a simile, but not so much so that it constitutes an extended narrative. As this thesis will go on to argue, particularly in its analysis of *El Criticón* in the following chapter, Gracián conceptualises the *concepto* as something which

man himself can come to embody, meaning that the timeframe within which *agudeza* and *ingenio* function can, in actual fact, be prolonged and projected throughout an entire lifetime. Critics' tendency to refract Gracián's *concepto* through the lens of rhetorical devices, the simile in this case, means that the true scope of his philosophy is effaced.

Sarmiento concedes that the *concepto* pertains to a more ethereal realm than that of pure rhetoric when he closes his article with the following observation:

In exalted moods of apprehension, we are able to admit all things into a just relationship of regeneration and grace, where triviality ceases to exist, where consciousness floats on the high seas of complete understanding, seeing them one in Christ. In such a mood the mind can take any element, however humble, 'gross' even, and see it in its relationship with the whole, and, perceiving that relationship, use it as a term of comparison, of elucidation. Such moods are rare, to many they are unknown, and, in essence, to live in that exaltation is to live the mystical life... But these conceptist sermons are fruitless to the mind not already dwelling on the plane of mental and spiritual exaltation; they may not arouse understanding, they can only excite derision (428–9).

Here Sarmiento arrives at the essence of what *agudeza*, the *concepto*, and *ingenio* tend towards: “apprehension”, “consciousness”, “understanding”, and “elucidation” all indicate that they afford some sort of insight or knowledge, and therefore carry an epistemological function. “Regeneration” and “rare” indicate that the knowledge granted by *agudeza* is not permanent and must be continually renewed. “Exalted”, “high seas”, “exaltation”, “mystical”, and “spiritual exaltation” all highlight the otherworldly, transcendent nature of the knowledge granted by *agudeza*. And “grace”, “Christ”, and “conceptist sermons” all point towards the fact that gaining knowledge in this way is a type of spiritual experience. In other words, *agudeza* and the *concepto*, via the intellectual faculty of *ingenio*, lead to a frame of mind which allows momentary insight into the interconnectedness and harmoniousness of the world, as if from a God-like stance. This momentary insight is akin to aesthetic experience, granting man transient and temporary insight into the universal. It is precisely the intangibility of the realm within which *agudeza*, the *concepto*, and *ingenio* function, and their inherent malleability and changeability, that makes them difficult to define.

Parker argues that much of the confusion prompted by the *Agudeza* is a result of the use of the English word ‘conceit’ to translate all instances of the Spanish word ‘concepto’. He points out that English has a more direct translation for the word ‘concepto’ – ‘concept’ – and questions why critics have been reluctant to translate it as such. He argues that by translating ‘concepto’ as ‘conceit’, no differentiation is

made between the *concepto* and *agudeza*, the former chronologically preceding the latter, and the latter representing the result of the former. Parker claims that using the word ‘conceit’ means that it “can appear as anything from the first simple idea in the mind to a highly complicated relationship of many metaphors in one single poetic discourse” (27). This means that no distinction is made between a person having an idea, and the expression of this idea, in thought, in speech, in writing, or through actions, for example. To delineate more clearly the transition from *concepto* (the idea) to the *agudeza/conceit* (the product), Parker proposes that ‘concept’ be used to translate ‘concepto’ when referring to “the idea which the mind conceives and which it develops by extending it to other interrelated ideas” (27), and to translate ‘concepto’ as ‘conceit’ when referring to a more complex string of correspondences between individual *conceptos*, which then becomes elevated to the status of a *conceit/agudeza*.

In making this argument, Parker outlines a linear, temporal process in which a *concepto/concept* is formed in the mind, *ingenio* links this *concepto/concept* to many others, and the resulting chain of *conceptos/concepts* is known as a *conceit/agudeza*. However, as Woods and Blanco point out, the progression from *concepto* to *agudeza* cannot be so clearly, and temporally, delineated for the reason that Gracián often uses the two terms interchangeably (7 and 55, respectively). As any rational interpreter seeking to understand how *agudeza* works would be inclined to do, Parker chooses to chart the creation of *agudeza* as a temporalised process, which begins with a *concepto* in the mind, the initial idea, and ends with the manifestation of this idea in the world, the objective product, the *conceit/agudeza*. Woods, on the other hand, by interpreting the *concepto* and *agudeza* as synonymous denies the possibility of temporality. He writes,

There can be no independent existence of either. Where there is a *concepto* then we have the birth of an *agudeza*. Where there is an *agudeza* then there must have been a prior *concepto* the only evidence for which from the audience’s point of view lies in the final *agudeza* (9).

The *concepto* in its special sense is a *correspondencia* as apprehended by the mind as it contemplates the possibility of producing an *agudeza* based on it. The three terms are thus inseparable. There can be no *agudeza* without a *concepto*, and no *concepto* without a *correspondencia*. The *agudeza* embodies a *concepto*, and the *concepto* embodies a *correspondencia* (11).

While Parker endeavours to separate the steps between the *concepto/concept* and the *agudeza/conceit*, Woods argues that they are one and the same, that the *concepto* is

the *agudeza*, and the *agudeza* is the *concepto*, both produced simultaneously and unable to exist without the other. For Woods, *agudeza* cannot be rationally broken down into a series of steps which can be clearly conceptualised because the concept, the idea in the mind, and its manifestation, are one and the same.

Parker and Woods therefore conceive of *agudeza* in two different ways: Parker sees *agudeza* as the result of a conscious and rational process, with clearly demarcated start and end points, whilst Woods sees it as an unconscious act, which materialises within man's mind without any active input. This brings us to the core of the debate regarding Gracián's conceptualisation of *agudeza*, the *concepto*, and *ingenio*, indicated by the paradox of the *Agudeza*'s title as an 'Arte de ingenio': is *agudeza* produced instinctively, intuitively, and spontaneously (as the word 'ingenio' implies), or is *agudeza* the result of a rational process of deliberation and practice (as the word 'arte' implies)? Can both processes result in *agudeza* (as Gracián's combination of 'ingenio' and 'arte' seems to imply)? Or is it that the instinctive, intuitive, and spontaneous production of *agudeza* is something that can be perfected through deliberated practice?

Woods' conceptualisation of the *concepto/agudeza* as both the idea in the mind and the objective product finds its roots in the Latin term 'conceptus' from whence the word 'concepto' is derived. Blanco points out that the Latin word 'conceptus' signifies both the action of containing and the thing contained (56). Today, the Spanish word 'concepto' and the English word 'concept' do not generally incorporate this duality. However, in medicine, the term 'conceptus' is still used to refer to the product of reproductive conception at any stage: during the act of fertilisation, the embryo, and the baby upon birth. This can be transposed to the context of the *Agudeza* to demonstrate that Gracián's *concepto* can refer to the initial stages in the germination of a thought, to the coming to fruition of a thought, and to the fully-formed thought itself (which can remain a thought, or can be outwardly articulated, or can be represented through action). For those trained in scholastic logic, such as Gracián, it is likely that the word 'concepto' still held the same connotations as the Latin term 'conceptus'.

Blanco and Fernández-Corugedo have highlighted (56 and 323, respectively) that Gracián's contemporary, and fellow Jesuit priest and philosopher, Francisco Suárez, in his *Disputationes metaphysicae*, comments upon the duality of the word 'conceptus' when he writes:

Conceptus formalis dicitur actus ipse, seu (quod idem est) verbum quo intellectus rem aliquam seu communem rationem concipit; qui dicitur conceptus, quia est veluti proles mentis; formalis autem appellatur, vel quia est ultima forma mentis, vel quia formaliter repraesentat menti rem cognitam, vel quia revera est intrinsecus et formalis terminus conceptionis mentalis, in quo differt a conceptu obiectivo, ut ita dicam. Conceptus obiectivus dicitur res illa, vel ratio, quae proprie et immediate per conceptum formalem cognoscitur seu repraesentatur; ut, verbi gratia, cum hominem concipimus, ille actus, quem in mente efficitur ad concipiendum hominem, vocatur conceptus formalis; homo autem cognitus et repraesentatus illo actu dicitur conceptus obiectivus, conceptus quidem per denominationem extrinsecam a conceptu formali, per quem obiectum eius concipi dicitur, et ideo recte dicitur obiectivus, quia non est conceptus ut forma intrinsece terminans conceptionem, sed ut obiectum et materia circa quam versatur formalis conceptio, et ad quam mentis acies directe tendit, propter quod ab aliquibus, ex Averroë, intentio intellecta appellatur; et ab aliis dicitur ratio obiectiva (II, I, 1–2).

In this passage, Suárez acknowledges the theoretical difference between what Parker terms the ‘concept’ and the ‘conceit’, while still stressing their essential unity by referring to both ideas as the “conceptus formalis” and the “conceptus obiectivus”. Suárez highlights the interdependence between the “conceptus formalis” and the “conceptus obiectivus” by using the simple example of man: we form our interior concept of man only thanks to our perception of man in world, and this is indicative, more generally, of the dependence of mental activity on the exterior world. At the same time, the universal idea of man exists thanks to the mind’s ability to abstract ideas from particular examples in the exterior world, to categorise them into general groups, and to give these groups labels such as ‘man’. As such, the idea of man, the “conceptus formalis”, exists thanks to the abstraction of our interior intellect, but our interior intellect only formed the idea of man thanks to the exterior existence of man, the “conceptus obiectivus”. This creates an ontological reciprocity between interiority and exteriority in which exterior existence and reality (*parecer*) are dependent upon interior conceptualisation (*ser*), and vice versa.

Furthermore, as Suárez points out, “conceptus formalis dicitur actus ipse, seu (quod idem est) verbum quo intellectus rem aliquam seu communem rationem concipit”: it is specifically the linguistic act of designating man as ‘man’ which is synonymous with the “conceptus formalis”. As such, Suárez proposes that thought itself is linguistic, meaning that there can be no stage to a thought prior to the articulation in language of that thought, even if this is not outwardly verbalised.

Blanco teases out the consequences of this when she writes,

L’acte, nommé concept formel, par lequel le concept objectif est formé, est donc identifié au mot ou à la parole. Il n’y a d’autre acte de conception que la parole elle-même, il n’y a de pensée que verbalisée. C’est pourquoi Gracián est en accord avec sa culture philosophique

quand il définit le *concepto* comme acte tout en sachant bien que tout son ouvrage implique sa nature verbale. Le *concepto* est une pensée en acte, c'est-à-dire une pensée qui résulte d'un acte d'expression, acte que, dès sa genèse même, est orienté vers cette pensée. Il y a donc circularité, ou impossibilité de désigner quelle est le terme premier du couple. Il est impossible à propos du *concepto*, comme à propos du *conceptus*, de séparer le moment de la pensée et celui de sa mise en forme (57).

Blanco, commenting upon Suárez's observations, concludes that thought is verbal, meaning that the "concept formel" is always a linguistic act which, in turn, means that the "concept formel" is the "concept objectif": thought is always objectified in language, even if it only exists in our mind, and cannot exist in any type of unobjectified form. The two types of 'concept' are therefore circular, harking back to the duality of the Latin term 'conceptus', representing both the *act* of containing and the thing contained: a man can exist in the world of *parecer*, but it is only via the action of the intellect, which is inherently linguistic, that the 'concept' of man exists in the world of *ser*. The realms of *ser* and *parecer* are therefore mutually, and ontologically, dependent and, in the moment of the *concepto/agudeza*, their mutual existence is asserted. This is what Andersen means when she states that *agudeza*, the *concepto*, and *ingenio* function within the remit of the relation between the realms of *ser* and *parecer*.

Given their contemporaneity, and their shared vocation, it is very likely that Gracián was familiar with Suárez's works, and Gracián's famous definition of the *concepto* shares a lexical similarity which hints towards a familiarity with the *Disputationes metaphysicae*. This definition, already partially cited, is rarely cited in full. The full definition reads,

De suerte que se puede definir el concepto: es un acto del entendimiento que exprime la correspondencia que se halla entre los objetos. La misma consonancia o correlación artificiosa exprimida es la sutileza objetiva (II, 27).

Like Suárez, Gracián defines the *concepto* as "un acto" which expresses (or wrings out) "la correspondencia" between "los objetos". Noteworthy is Gracián's use of the term 'correspondencia', which encapsulates the essence of the Latin term 'ratio' (which can be translated into English as 'system', 'connection', or 'relation'). Gracián does not initially differentiate between the "conceptus formalis" and the "concepto obiectivus", as Suárez does. However, he shows his awareness of this differentiation when he states that the very "consonancia o correlación" is "la sutileza objetiva". In other words, the interconnections and unexpected links (the "conceptus formalis")

that man perceives in his mind, and simultaneously, and inevitably, expresses in language (the “acto”) during the moment of the *concepto*, are the “concepto obiectivus” or “ratio”. Just as Suárez outlines that the “intentio intellecta” and the “ratio obiectiva” are interchangeable, Gracián too conflates the *concepto* and the *agudeza*: the *concepto* is the *agudeza*, and vice versa.

This adherence to Suárez’s ideas concerning the ontological interdependence of the “conceptus formalis” and the “conceptus obiectivus” indicates that Gracián’s conceptualisation of the *concepto* is more, although not fully, in line with Woods’ interpretation than with that of Parker: while Parker temporally delineates each step in the process of the production of *agudeza*, from the initial concept to the fully-formed conceit, Woods argues that the *concepto* and the *agudeza* are simultaneous and therefore synonymous. As such, it follows that the kind of knowledge or insight granted by the *concepto/agudeza*, which we know to be transient, aesthetic, and somewhat ethereal, tends to be the result of something instinctive, intuitive, and spontaneous, rather than of a conscious, rational, and deliberated process. This means that Gracián is proposing an approach towards epistemology which is not based upon reason or logic: whilst judgement makes a choice between different options, and whilst reason aggregates judgements to arrive at logical conclusions, the ‘conceptus’ designates the type of knowledge granted by intuition, and it is to this kind of knowledge that Gracián’s conceptualisation of *agudeza*, the *concepto*, and *ingenio*, for the most part, pertains. Nevertheless, the text’s title, as an ‘Arte de ingenio’, suggests that there is a sense in which *ingenio*, usually understood to be innate and unconscious, can be learned, honed, and perfected through dedicated practice. As such, the interpretations of Parker and Woods, although seemingly dissenting, are both valid.

*Epistemology: Overcoming Scepticism Via the Universal Insight of Aesthetic Experience*

In *discurso LV* of the *Agudeza* Gracián tells the allegorical story of Verdad, who was happily married to Entendimiento. One day, Mentira comes along and chases Verdad out of their marital bed. Verdad, exiled and destitute, is taken under the wing of Agudeza who listens to her plight and offers a solution:

Viéndose la Verdad despreciada, y aun perseguida, acogióse a la Agudeza, comunicóla su trabajo, y consultóla su remedio. “Verdad amiga, dijo la Agudeza, no hay manjar más desabrido en estos estragados tiempos que un desengaño a secas; mas, ¡qué digo desabrido!, no hay bocado más amargo que una verdad desnuda. La luz que derechamente hiere atormenta los ojos de una águila, de un lince; ¡cuánto más los que flaquean! Para esto inventaron los sagaces médicos del ánimo el arte de dorar las verdades, de azucarar los desengaños. Quiero decir – y observadme bien esta lición, estimadme este consejo – que os hagáis política; vestíos al uso del mismo Engaño, disfrazaos con sus mismos arreos, que con eso yo os aseguro el remedio y aun el vencimiento (563).

When married to Entendimiento, Truth and Understanding were directly associated with one another. However, due to the machinations of Mentira, the intrinsic connection between Verdad and Entendimiento was severed. As such, Verdad finds herself rebutted and rejected, even when in plain sight. Agudeza explains to Verdad that she is unpalatable when she shows herself too directly and encourages her to adopt a disguise in order to sweeten herself. Agudeza tells Verdad to use *engaño* in order to lead to *desengaño*, and to manipulate her surface appearance in order to make her underlying message more digestible. In other words, Agudeza instructs Verdad to manipulate her *parecer* in order to reveal more effectively her *ser*. Verdad comes to appreciate Agudeza’s advice, stating,

Abrió los ojos la Verdad, dio desde entonces en andar con artificio; usa de las invenciones, introdúcese por rodeos, vence con estratagemas, pinta lejos lo que está muy cerca, habla de lo presente en lo pasado, propone en aquel sujeto lo que quiere condenar en éste, apunta a uno para dar en otro, deslumbra las pasiones, desmiente los afectos, y por ingenioso circunloquio viene siempre a parar en el punto de su intención (563).

With this allegory, Gracián is stressing that uncovered Truth no longer prompts immediate understanding and can no longer rely on direct perception to be believed, echoing the evasiveness of Truth described by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, which resulted from the decline of the human condition during its descent from Golden to Iron Age (book one, ll. 89–150).<sup>42</sup> Rather, Gracián writes, Truth must insert herself into and conform with the realm of *parecer* in order for her *ser* to be manifest in the world. This “ingenioso circunloquio” is the only way for Truth to be accessed, once again showing that, for Gracián, Truth and the world, form and content, *ser* and *parecer*, all go hand-in-hand.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Specifically, ll. 127–32: “de duro est ultima ferro. / protinus inrupit venae peioris in aevum / omne nefas: fugere pudor verumque fidesque; / in quorum subiere locum fraudesque dolusque / insidiaeque et vis et amor sceleratus habendi”.

<sup>43</sup> Truth’s affiliation with *Agudeza* is also depicted by Mateo de Alemán in his *Guzmán de Alfarache* (3.VII), from whence Gracián may have drawn inspiration.

The belief that *ser* cannot be accessed without *parecer*, and that Truth cannot be attained without some form of *engaño*, has often been interpreted, along Ovidian lines, as a sign of seventeenth-century Spain's epistemological angst. Robbins, for example, characterises the era as one suffering a "crisis of knowledge" (1998: 9), in which "reality is little better than an illusion" (1998: 36): if *ser* is always intertwined with *parecer* and can never be glimpsed and known in itself, how is man to navigate the changeable and uncertain realm of *parecer* in order to access the certainty of *ser*? If all knowledge is gleaned from the realm of *parecer* does that mean that all knowledge is contingent, provisional, and subject to constant renewal? Can man ever access Truth which is universal and unchanging, akin to Cartesian clear and distinct truths? Or is all knowledge inevitably subject to sceptical doubt?

Whilst pointing out the epistemological crisis of Gracián's era, Robbins also highlights the positive role that *agudeza* can play in transcending this crisis when he states,

The turn of the mind which creates conceits uncovers a universe of otherwise hidden links between things. The *ingenio* via the conceit unifies intellectually a world of otherwise disparate and distinct entities... Wit on this reading thus becomes a means of holding together a world which was increasingly falling apart (1998: 100–1).

Whilst many critics have focused on the uncertain, Baroque world of "disparate and distinct entities... increasingly falling apart" when interpreting Gracián's works, Robbins here draws attention to the constructive role that Gracián grants to *ingenio* and *agudeza* as a means via which man can overcome the confusion and uncertainty of the world. The ability of man to make connections, and to comprehend momentarily the harmony of the world from a universal, God-like point of view, points towards an epistemological Optimism in Gracián's works which is often overlooked, arguably because the roles of *agudeza*, the *concepto*, and *ingenio* have not been fully understood.

In a similar manner to the Renaissance Neoplatonists, Gracián's epistemological Optimism is manifest through the way in which he proposes momentary attainment of universal insight via the particular. Unlike Descartes, who eschews worldly particulars due to their susceptibility to doubt, Gracián follows the more optimistic Neoplatonic model, which embraces particularity as the only route via which the universal can be accessed. As examined in Chapter Two, Castiglione, in his *Il libro del Cortegiano*, described the process by which man must abstract from a

physical manifestation of beauty towards an increasingly disembodied and universal concept of Beauty, after which he must then abstract from his own intellect towards the universal intellect, enabling him to bask subsequently in the divine presence and to experience the clarity of universal insight.

However, whilst replicating the Neoplatonists' optimistic conceptualisation of worldly particulars, Gracián achieves universal insight in a slightly different way. *Ingenio*, for Gracián, does not abstract from something which is already in existence towards a universal concept of this thing, and eventually towards the divine. As the roots of Gracián's thinking in the work of Francisco Suárez indicate, the moment in which *ingenio* functions sees the simultaneous creation of both concept and thing conceived, bringing into existence the 'conceptus' or the *concepto/agudeza*. Furthermore, while Suárez uses the simple example of 'man' to exemplify the interdependence of the "conceptus formalis" and the "conceptus obiectiva", his conflation of the "conceptus obiectivus" with the "ratio obiectiva" shows that, like Gracián, he too conceptualises the 'conceptus' not only as a discrete entity which objectively and physically exists, such as man, a horse, the colour yellow, or the number four (Blanco 57), but also as a more abstract and intangible system of connections. This "correspondencia", as Gracián terms it, does not exist, for man, in the same way that a horse or a man does. However, this does not mean to say that it does not exist at all, either formally or objectively. Rather, the "correspondencia", representing an insight into the interconnectedness of the world, exists in another form: in the mind of God. The moment in which the *concepto/agudeza* is perceived/articulated therefore represents a brief moment of universal insight. This makes it fleeting and transient, but it also grants it a seraphic intensity as the perceiver is absorbed in the simultaneous perception and articulation of a "correspondencia" which bestows upon him an ethereal understanding of the interconnectedness of the world as if from a divine and universal point of view.

This is undoubtedly what Sarmiento had in mind when he described "exalted moods of apprehension...where consciousness floats on the high seas of complete understanding" (428). Unlike Descartes, who searches for universal and unchanging Truth in man's interiority, a defining characteristic of Gracián's version of universal insight is the necessity of its constant reconfiguration and regeneration: man cannot perceive the universal permanently because being able to do so would make him divine. However, he does have the ability, using *ingenio*, to reconfigure repeatedly his

perception of the world in order to reignite his awareness of the universal and of divinity. Due to its inherent circumstantiality and changeability, Hidalgo-Serna describes the action of *ingenio* as “un modo de filosofar que parte de lo individual y concreto” (61), and, in direct contrast to the Cartesian approach, as “un método de conocimiento no racional” (136). Perception/articulation of the *concepto/agudeza* does not typically occur in a rational way which makes it a difficult process upon which to theorise conclusively. Blanco hits upon this difficulty when she describes the perception/articulation of the *concepto/agudeza* as “non plus métaphysique mais poétique” (58), highlighting the way in which Gracián’s notion of epistemological Truth does not align itself with the universal Truth usually reached through traditional, philosophical reasoning, and is, rather, closely aligned with the sudden and temporary access to universality granted by aesthetic experience.

As outlined in the previous chapter, the seeds of this conflation of epistemological Truth, insight into the universal, and aesthetic experience were planted in Gracián’s very first work, *El Héroe*. In this text, Gracián stressed the complementarity of both *juicio* and *ingenio*, showing them to be mutually committed to the endeavour of gaining understanding, meaning that they both carry an epistemological function. However, whilst *juicio* was taken to be synonymous with ‘reason’, as this term was usually understood at the time (as the spark of the divine left within man after the Fall which grants him access to indubitable and objective truths in his interiority through the process of *synderesis*), *ingenio*, on the other hand, was shown to designate a different type of reason: in *El Héroe* Gracián outlined the way in which *ingenio* is intertwined with *gusto*, ‘taste’, a concept usually confined to the realm of aesthetics. By describing *ingenio*, whose epistemological role had already been established, as “pleito ante el tribunal del gusto” (III, 49), Gracián succeeded in *El Héroe* in intertwining *ingenio* and *gusto*, understanding and beauty, and epistemology and aesthetics.

This intertwining, briefly articulated in the earlier work, comes to the fore in the *Agudeza*. In *discurso II* of this later text, for example, Gracián discourages the reader from trying to define something as intangible as *agudeza*, stating: “déjase percibir, no definir; y en tan remoto asunto, estímesese cualquiera descripción: lo que es para los ojos la hermosura, y para los oídos la consonancia, eso es para el entendimiento el concepto” (21). Here Gracián overtly tells his readers to refrain from trying to theorise rationally upon the *concepto/agudeza* and to instead “déjase

percibir”, indicating that this perception will come without purposeful instigation. He also draws a comparison between the sensual faculties of sight and sound, and the intellect, and connects the intellectual satisfaction which results from the *concepto* to the aesthetic satisfaction which results from visual beauty and musical harmony. The intellect is therefore shown to function like the other senses, using exterior experience, about which Descartes was so sceptical, as the base upon which to work towards the perception/articulation of aesthetic beauty and harmony, and upon which to gain universal insight. As such, a link is overtly established between the *concepto/agudeza*, aesthetic experience, and understanding of the universal. Ayala Martínez articulates this when he states that “para Gracián el mundo es un reflejo de la inteligencia divina; en consecuencia, la verdad y la belleza andan unidas y son para el hombre una fuente inagotable de sentido. Este mundo cualitativo sólo el ingenio es capaz de desvelarlo” (2004: 129). The unique ability of *ingenio* to reach this state of aesthetic rapture is stressed when Gracián states later in the same *discurso* that “no se contenta el ingenio con solo la verdad, como el juicio, sino que aspira a la hermosura” (II, 26). Both *juicio* and *ingenio* seek “la verdad”, but only for *ingenio* is “hermosura” a prerequisite for it to be perceived/articulated.

Whilst Gracián briefly introduced his conceptualisation of *gusto* in his first work, *El Héroe*, we also saw in the previous chapter his development of this concept in *El Discreto*. In this text, Gracián explained that “siempre va el gusto en adelante, nunca vuelve atrás; no se ceba en lo que ya pasó, siempre pica en la novedad”, and remarked that “vese esto más en los empleos del ingenio, que, aunque sean cosas muy sabidas, si el modo del decirlas en el retórico y del escribirlas en el historiador fuere nuevo, las hace apetecibles” (XXII, 185). As such, Gracián expresses the idea that *gusto*, once accomplished, is never satisfied, and it is the task of *ingenio* to revive and regenerate “cosas muy sabidas” in such a way as to render them once again “apetecibles”. *Ingenio* therefore functions to recombine facets which are already well known in order to re-reveal the truths inherent in them, and to continually regenerate novelty which leads to a kind of *admiración*, which is akin to aesthetic rapture. Unlike *juicio*, which reveals atemporal and objective universal truths, the universality revealed by *ingenio* is transient and requires constant renewal, and this renewal, in its dependence on contrived reconfiguration, is necessarily artificial, in contrast to the connotations of instinct and intuition that the word ‘ingenio’ usually carries.

Gracián links the action of *ingenio* to art and artifice in the *Agudeza* when he writes in *discurso II*:

Toda potencia intencional del alma, digo las que perciben objetos, gozan de algún artificio en ellos; la proporción entre las partes del visible es la hermosura; entre los sonidos la consonancia: que hasta el vulgar gusto halla combinación entre lo picante y suave, entre lo dulce y lo agrio. El entendimiento, pues, como primera y principal potencia, álzase con la prima del artificio, con lo estremado del primor, en todas sus diferencias de objetos. Destínanse las artes a estos artificios, que para su composición fueron inventadas, adelantando siempre y facilitando su perfección (25).

Here Gracián again makes a connection between sensual and intellectual satisfaction, connecting the visual “hermosura” of something symmetrical, musical “consonancia”, and the delight of harmonious flavours in the mouth, with the intellectual satisfaction which can come via “entendimiento”. He therefore, once again, links sense experience and the intellect via their shared goal of attaining a state of aesthetic rapture. However, whilst perception of the aesthetic is usually taken to be something intuitive and spontaneous, an instinctual elevation of man’s consciousness towards the divine, Gracián here describes elevation towards the aesthetic as something more deliberated: he refers to man’s “potencia intencional” which builds upon the foundation of “artificio”; he describes the objects which the senses perceive in terms of their artificial “proporción”, “combinación”, and “composición”; he states that “entendimiento” elevates itself “con la prima del artificio”; and he describes the way in which “las artes” were “inventadas” for “estos artificios”, with the aim of “adelantando siempre y facilitando su perfección”. The function of *ingenio* is therefore to perceive and, more imperatively, to reconfigure and to re-perceive, the connections which can be made between things on the plane of the intellect, in the same way that we can find visual symmetry, look for aural rhythms, and notice patterns in taste which go beyond those which are immediately obvious.

The necessity that man repeatedly and artificially regenerate aesthetic *admiración*, using his *ingenio*, in order to renew and refresh his consciousness of the interconnectedness and harmoniousness of God’s creation, is paradoxical, and it is this paradox which is encapsulated in the text’s title: aesthetic rapture is usually conceptualised as a state which overcomes and overwhelms the consumer of a piece of art without conscious volition. However, in the *Agudeza*, Gracián is outlining his belief that man must purposefully and artificially cultivate this state of aesthetic rapture by adopting a way of being in the world which actively seeks to perceive

connections, with the inevitable consequence that these connections become more and more unexpected, novel, witty, and bedazzling. As such, Gracián encourages an approach towards the world which reconciles the interpretations of Parker and Woods: after man's initial novelty towards the world has worn off, he must work to reproduce this novelty via artificial means, perceiving and articulating the *concepto* and *agudeza* using the rationalised and temporalised process outlined by Parker. Once man has become proficient in this practice, he will begin to implement it without conscious effort, at which point the action of *ingenio* and the production of the *concepto/agudeza* becomes spontaneous, and it is then that man's *ingenio* reaches its perfection: a product of intuition and instinct, rather than of reason and logic. Gracián exemplifies this refinement of *ingenio* through the characters of Critilo and Andrenio in *El Criticón* and this process will be analysed in the following chapter.

*1.II of "El Criticón": Andrenio's Contemplation of the Stars and Critilo's Explanation of 'Ingenio'*

In order to follow Critilo and Andrenio's gradual refinement of their *ingenio*, from a faculty which must be implemented in a contrived, artificial, and rationalised fashion, to a faculty which implements itself intuitively and spontaneously, an analysis of the entirety of *El Criticón* is necessary, which will be carried out in the following chapter. Nevertheless, a brief analysis of 1.II, 'El gran teatro del Universo', allows us to apprehend generally the way in which Gracián's conceptualisation of *ingenio* works. In this *crisi* Andrenio describes the way in which he was freed from the cave in which he had hitherto been trapped on the Isla Santa Elena, thanks to an earthquake, and his feelings when discovering the world for the first time. Upon doing so Andrenio is nearly immobilised by *admiración* for everything he sees, representing the initial amazement and ease with which man can come to an awareness of the glory of the world and of the divine. Dazzled by this glory, Andrenio's attention turns towards the source of it, towards God, who is represented by the sun, as per this scene's antecedent in Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave'. However, Andrenio swiftly turns his attention away from the sun and towards the variety and novelty of the night sky. Whilst admiring these qualities, he questions why God did not arrange the stars in the sky with uniformity, as would usually be expected from an all-powerful creator. It is at this point that Critilo explains to Andrenio the way in

which the varied and changeable dispersion of the stars in the night sky enables man to make diverse connections which allow the glory of God to be revealed in many different ways. As such, thanks to variety and changeability, represented here by the fluctuating stars of the night sky, man's initial *admiración* when faced with the glory of the world does not wane and, via the implementation of *ingenio*, can be repeatedly refreshed and regenerated throughout his life.

This *crisi* of *El Criticón* is an important one, not just because it contains the scene in which Critilo explains to Andrenio the way in which *ingenio* works, but also because it has frequently been used by critics to argue that Gracián dismisses the possibility of a divine creator which, upon close reading, is clearly shown to be an erroneous conclusion. Forcione highlighted that this *crisi* takes direct inspiration from Fray Luis de Granada's hexameral narrative, *Introducción del símbolo de la fe* (1997: 5). Hexameral texts typically assert the divine origins of the world by describing the way in which the rational language of the 'book of the world' can be read to reveal God as creator. Such texts assert the cosmic connection between God and man via the shared faculty of rationality. Andrenio's observation that the stars in the night sky are not dispersed in a uniform fashion has been read as a negation of God's rationality, and as proof that Gracián fails to perceive the existence of a rational creator from the evidence supplied by an irrational and disordered world, representing a purposeful rupture of the chain of communication between God and man usually espoused by hexameral texts.

Forcione calls this scene "a parody of Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*" (1997: 31), arguing that the "cosmic disconnection" between man, the world, and God that it depicts forces man into the necessity of sculpting himself (24). He interprets the scene as symptomatic of a "chaotic reality" (35), and argues that Gracián presents a "new condition of man as a distanced being, separated from the traditional cosmos which had offered a reassuring model for his identity as co-equal with creator and created order in their shared rationality" (42). Forcione accurately highlights that Gracián breaks the bounds of reason which have traditionally tied man to God. However, his error lies in interpreting this rupture negatively. For Gracián, the idea that man and God share the same faculty of rationality is impossible because man is not divine and can never hope to achieve the same cognitive abilities as God. Rather, Gracián posits an alternative form of reason, *ingenio*, which does not grant man understanding of the divine, but which does allow

him to perceive the immensity and perfection of that which he does not understand, leading to a kind of insight into the universal which does not aspire towards an understanding of it.

1.II of *El Criticón* begins with Andrenio's description of his initial sense of *admiración* upon entering the world for the first time. Critilo then expresses his nostalgia for this feeling, explaining that, as the world becomes more familiar, it loses its novelty and its ability to spark such a reaction. He states,

¡Oh, lo que te envidio... tanta felicidad no imaginada, privilegio único del primer hombre y tuyo: llegar a ver con novedad y con advertencia la grandeza, la hermosura, el concierto, la firmeza y la variedad desta gran máquina criada! Fáltanos la admiración comúnmente a nosotros porque falta la novedad, y con ésta la advertencia. Entramos todos en el mundo con los ojos del ánimo cerrados y cuando los abrimos al conocimiento, ya la costumbre de ver las cosas, por maravillosas que sean, no dexa lugar a la admiración. Por esso, los varones sabios se valieron siempre de la reflexión, imaginándose llegar de nuevo al mundo, reparando en sus prodigios, que cada cosa lo es, admirando sus perfecciones y filosofando artificiosamente (77).

When a being such as “[el] primer hombre”, a *tabula rasa* or a ‘noble savage’ figure, enters the world, the “novedad”, “grandeza”, “hermosura”, “concierto”, “firmeza”, and “variedad” of creation are immediately able to elevate his mind towards contemplation of the interconnectedness of the “gran máquina criada”, towards the beauty and harmony of the totality of God's creation. As he becomes more accustomed to the world, man loses his “advertencia”, existing “con los ojos del ánimo cerrados”. To combat this, and to reignite his sense of wonder, man must change his “costumbre de ver las cosas”, imagining himself arriving “de nuevo al mundo”, and enabling him to reflect upon “sus prodigios” and “sus perfecciones” in a more deliberated and contrived way: “filosofando artificiosamente”.

After describing his initial awe towards the wonder of the world, Andrenio next describes the way in which his mind turned towards the source of this wonder, towards God, symbolised by the sun, representing man's tendency to strive towards an epistemological certainty which is beyond his reach: man can never obtain permanent access to the divine because this type of universal understanding is simply beyond his station as a human being. Andrenio calls the sun “esse gran monarca de la luz”, and the symbolism inherent in it is confirmed when Critilo describes the sun as “la criatura que más ostentosamente retrata la magestuosa grandeza del Criador” (78). Andrenio recalls the way in which his curiosity towards the sun grew into an

obsession, stating, “todo el día...empleé en él, contemplándose ya en sí, ya en los reflexos de las aguas, olvidado de mí mismo” (79), which culminates with his lament,

Mas ¡ay!...que al uso de acá baxo, la grandeza de mi contento se convirtió presto en un exceso de pesar al ver, digo, al no verle, trocóse la alegría del nacer en el horror del morir, el trono de la mañana en el túmulo de la noche: sepultóse el sol en las aguas y quedé yo anegado en otro mar de mi llanto. Creí no verle más, con que quedé muriendo (79).

Andrenio’s natural curiosity towards the sun/God soon turns into “un exceso de pesar”, in which “la alegría del nacer” becomes “el horror del morir”. We therefore see that excessive contemplation of the source of creation, instead of simply enjoying this creation, turns “la mañana” into “la noche”: by becoming excessively fixated with the idea of God, man’s innocent curiosity, and epistemological potential, is darkened, as he ends up “muriendo” and with nothing but “llanto” upon realising the impossibility of attaining the type of knowledge to which he aspires. This scene’s antecedent in Plato’s ‘Allegory of the Cave’ confirms the deduction that Andrenio’s yearning for the sun signifies a desire to possess knowledge of an unknowable force, which Plato conceptualises as the ‘Idea of the Good’, and which Gracián conceptualises as the Christian God. Just as the reality of the people chained in Plato’s cave was a product of the fire forming shadows against the cave wall, the sun also forges our reality in the same way. The inhabitants of Plato’s cave were unable to see behind the fire, just as we can never fully conceptualise the sun/God: man must simply accept reality for what it appears to be and live in it without superior insight. As Fernández-Corugedo states, such insight “nos produciría un estado de éxtasis permanente, arrancándonos de este mundo” (76). Andrenio’s obsession with the sun, his inability to think of anything else, and his panic as it set every evening, represents an unhealthy fixation with the unknowable, and a desire to understand the world in a way which is beyond man’s cognitive abilities.

Through Andrenio’s obsession with the sun, Gracián depicts man’s tendency to yearn towards unknowable knowledge. However, Gracián also depicts Andrenio’s innate ability to set aside these epistemological aspirations, which he does by shifting his attention towards contemplation of the night sky, stating, “pero volví presto a resucitar entre nuevas admiraciones a un cielo coronado de luminarias, haciendo fiesta a mi contento. Assigúrote que no me fue menos agradable vista ésta, antes más entretenida cuanto más varia” (79). Andrenio describes the way in which the variety of “un cielo coronado de luminarias”, the stars sparking in the darkness of the night

sky, provoked for him just as much “contento” as the stable and uniform brightness of the sun, and indeed points out that the night sky was all the more “agradable” thanks to this variety and changeability. He goes on to remark,

En lo que yo mucho reparé...fue en su maravillosa disposición. Porque ya que el soberano Artífice hermoseó tanto esta artesonada bóveda del mundo con tanto florón y estrella, ¿por qué no las dispuso, decía yo, con orden y concierto, de modo que entretejeran vistosos lazos y formaran primorosas labores? No sé cómo me lo diga ni cómo lo declare (80).

Whilst conceding that the variety of the night sky was pleasing to him, describing its “maravillosa disposición”, Andrenio expresses surprise that “el soberano Artífice”, God, decided to distribute the stars without “orden y concierto”, explaining that he expected a divine creator to distribute them with more formal regularity and symmetry, in such a way that they formed “vistosos lazos” and “primorosas labores”.

Critilo is then able to demonstrate to Andrenio the way in which variety and changeability allow access to universal insight on the plane of the intellect via the implementation of *ingenio*. He explains that formal uniformity, “en forma ya de un artificioso recamado, ya de un vistoso jardín, ya de un precioso joyel” (80), pertains simply to surface appearances, and that whilst this may be visually and sensually pleasing, it fails to elevate man’s intellect towards consciousness of the universal and the divine. He states,

Reparas bien...pero advierte que la divina sabiduría que las formó y las repartió [las estrellas] desta suerte atendió a otra más importante correspondencia, cual lo es la de sus movimientos y aquel templarse las influencias. Porque has de saber, que no hay astro alguno en el cielo que no tenga su diferente propiedad, así como las yerbas y las plantas de la tierra: unas de las estrellas causan el calor, otras el frío; unas secan, otras humedecen; y desta suerte alternan otras muchas influencias y con essa esencial correspondencia unas a otras se corrigen y se templan. La otra disposición artificiosa, que tú dizes fuera afectada y uniforme, quédese para los juguetes del arte y de la humana niñería. Deste modo, se nos haze cada noche nuevo el cielo y nunca enfada el mirarlo: cada uno proporciona las estrellas como quiere; a más de que en esta variedad natural y confusión grave parecen tanto más que el vulgo las juzga innumerables, y con esto queda como en enigma la suprema asistencia, si bien para los sabios muy clara y entendida (81).

Critilo explains that a “disposición artificiosa”, such as that of a carefully embroidered tapestry, an artfully sculpted garden, or a scrupulously crafted jewel, is “para los juguetes del arte y de la humana niñería”, indicating that things which show an attractive surface appearance should not be venerated simply because their *parecer* is visually pleasing to, and conceptualisable by, man. Rather, what is more worthy of the attention of the intellect is the “correspondencia” to be discerned between things which functions below the surface, in the realm of *ser*. In the case of the stars,

discerning this “correspondencia” involves becoming aware of the laws which dictate a star’s “movimientos” and of the “influencias” which decide why a star is the way it is (a certain temperature, for example). Critilo explains that all stars, as well as the rest of God’s creation, such as “las yerbas y las plantas”, have their own unique, “diferente propiedad”, and all play complementary roles within a balanced and harmonious larger whole. Beyond surface appearances, God’s creation exists in a delicate balance and it is through the perception of the hidden laws, “essa esencial correspondencia”, which maintain this delicate balance that man is able to elevate his intellect towards *admiración*, aesthetic rapture, and temporary insight into the universal.

Whilst the stars enter man’s intellect visually, via their *parecer*, it is the job of *ingenio*, firstly, to assimilate this surface appearance and then, secondly, to make connections between the stars which go beyond their surface appearance, confirming Andersen’s assertion that *ingenio* concerns itself with the realm of *ser* as well as with the link between the realms of *ser* and *parecer*. However, whilst *parecer* provides a, relatively, objective source for man to assimilate, his assimilation of this source, and his synthesis of it through his intellect, will always be subjective. For this reason, Critilo states that “cada uno proporciona las estrellas como quiere”. In other words, each individual implements *ingenio* differently, meaning that the possible resulting “correspondencias” and *conceptos/agudezas* will be particular to each individual: what is important is not so much the *concepto/agudeza* itself, but that the *concepto/agudeza* affords man a glimpse into the interconnectedness of the world, and that this subsequently succeeds in elevating his intellect and in granting it insight into the universal.

The inherent subjectivity of *ingenio*, combined with the changeability and variety of the world, to the extent that Critilo points out that “se nos haze cada noche nuevo el cielo y nunca enfada el mirarlo”, means that it is impossible to theorise conclusively on how *agudeza*, the *concepto*, and *ingenio* function. It is for this reason that Blanco describes trying to classify the different types of *agudeza* as like trying to group them together, “comme les étoiles en constellations” (253). The essentially arbitrary nature of *ingenio* was exacerbated by Gracián through the purposefully indeterminate and infinitely proliferating categorisations of *agudeza* outlined in *discurso III* of the *Agudeza* (31–9), which provided little clarity as to the structure of the work to follow. Just as *ingenio* must reconfigure haphazard elements, such as

stars in the sky, in order to bring about a sense of artificial coherence, such as a neat stellar constellation, which then leads to a kind of comprehension in the form of aesthetic rapture, Gracián's reader must work individually to synthesise the diverse *discursos* of the *Agudeza* itself in order to attain clarity. The *Agudeza* therefore continues a technique of formal heterogeneity and, arguably, incoherence, which began with the miscellaneous *primores* of *El Héroe*, the variegating *realces* of *El Discreto*, and the disparate aphorisms of the *Oráculo*.

The image of an infinite number of haphazardly-ordered stars in the night sky is one which Gracián evidently considered apposite, using it, both in *El Criticón* and elsewhere, to represent the apparently chaotic variety of the world, and the necessity that *ingenio* forge connections between the seemingly disparate elements within creation. The seeds of the scene in which Andrenio contemplates the disorder of the stars, and Critilo explains the way in which *ingenio* works, are sewn throughout the *Agudeza*, where Gracián makes repeated references to the stars, the firmament, and the constellations. For example, in *discurso III* he states,

La uniformidad limita, la variedad dilata; y tanto es más sublime cuanto más nobles perfecciones multiplica. No brillan tantos astros en el firmamento, campean flores en el prado, cuantas se alternan sutilezas en una fecunda inteligencia (III, 29).

Here Gracián explicitly points out the superiority of “la variedad” over “la uniformidad”, stating that the latter limits whilst the former opens up possibility, and argues that the more varied and apparently chaotic the world is, and the more “perfecciones” which exist within it, the more “sublime” it is. He also confirms that proliferation is a mark of *ingenio* when he states that “una fecunda inteligencia” can produce more “sutilezas” than there are “astros en el firmamento” or “flores en el prado”. Whilst stressing the insuperable creative powers of *ingenio*, Gracián sees a fitting reflection of its creative and regenerative abilities in the image of a seemingly infinite number of stars populating the firmament.

Elsewhere in *discurso III* of the *Agudeza* Gracián again uses the image of stars in the sky to demonstrate the way in which *ingenio* works, in relation to what he classifies as “agudeza compuesta”. He states,

La agudeza compuesta consta de muchos actos y partes principales, si bien se unen en la moral y artificiosa trabazón de un discurso. Cada piedra de las preciosas, tomada de por sí, pudiera oponerse a estrella; pero muchas juntas en un joyel, parece que pueden emular el firmamento; composición artificiosa del ingenio, en que se erige máquina sublime, no de columnas ni arquivadas, sino de asuntos y de conceptos (III, 38).

Gracián here describes the way in which “un discurso” is made up of “muchos actos y partes principales” which are woven together in an “artificiosa trabazón” to form a longer and more complex piece of writing. Each one of these “actos y partes” is like a “piedra de las preciosas” or an “estrella” in the night sky: beautiful in themselves, but even more beautiful when they interconnect with other components and make up a larger “trabazón”, whether that be “un discurso”, in relation to words, “un joyel”, in relation to precious stones, or “el firmamento”, in relation to stars. This “trabazón”, the web of connections forged between components, is the “composición artificiosa del ingenio”, via which man can gain a consciousness of the interconnectedness of the “máquina sublime”, not simply visually, but on the plane of “asuntos y...conceptos”. Although the world may appear chaotic to man, it is perfect and has a coherence which lies beyond his cognitive abilities. The function of *ingenio* is to connect what appear to be chaotic components into a “trabazón” of connections from which the order inherent within the apparent disorder of creation can be temporarily and transiently glimpsed, the only form of universal insight of which man is capable.

Towards the end of 1.II of *El Criticón*, Critilo reflects upon Andrenio’s fixation with the sun, representing the tendency of man to yearn towards perfect insight: “pero lo más digno de notarse es que, assí como el sol es claro espejo de Dios y de sus divinos atributos, la luna lo es del hombre y de sus humanas imperfecciones” (82). As such, Critilo confirms Gracián’s belief that man has limited epistemological potential and that the clarity afforded to the sun/God will never be within his grasp. However, he also points out that the night sky, characterised by changeability and inconstancy, represented here by the waxing and waning of the moon, is where man’s epistemological potential can be realised. The necessity of variety for man’s cognitive abilities to function is also expressed in the *Agudeza*, again using the symbolism of the night sky. Gracián writes in *discurso LX*,

Puédese decir de los conceptos lo que de las figuras retóricas: ni todo el cielo es estrellas, ni todo el cielo es vacíos; sirven éstos como de fondos para que campeen más los altos de aquéllas; y alternanse las sombras para que brillan más las luces (610).

For “los conceptos” to occur, the sky can neither be composed completely of stars, which would be akin to perfect insight, nor can it be completely empty, which would be akin to no insight at all. It is precisely the mix of “las sombras” and “las luces”, represented by the light of the stars and the moon within the void of the night sky,

that affords man the possibility to make connections and to reach a kind of insight into the universal which is fitting to his station. For this reason, variety and apparent disorder are prerequisites for *ingenio* to function and for it to contrive an arbitrary sense of coherence from a world which is fundamentally beyond man's understanding. The connections that man makes, and the *conceptos/agudezas* which he produces, are less important than his very ability to make them: creating constellations from the stars, for example, is an arbitrary process, producing no formal or physical product, which can be recommenced at any time from any starting point. As such, Gracián does not champion the *concepto/agudeza* so much as our inexhaustible *ability* to create them and to use them to see order within disorder (i.e. the *act* of creating the *concepto/agudeza*, the “acto del entendimiento”, as per his definition of the *concepto* in *discurso II* of the *Agudeza* (27)).

From these brief examples, it is evident that the seeds of the type of *ingenio* expounded in *El Criticón* were present in Gracián's mind during the production of the *Agudeza*. As the *Agudeza*'s lack of popularity suggests, this conceptualisation of *ingenio* was arguably expressed in a more engaging way through the use of narrative fiction. The points at which the *Agudeza* is most engaging tend to be the points at which it corresponds most closely to the form and content of *El Criticón*. For example, when Gracián uses the image of the stars in the night sky to expound his conceptualisation of *ingenio*, as has been examined in this section, but also during many other points of alignment: when Gracián speaks about the figure of Momo in *discursos XXIII* and *XXVIII*; when he references the philosophy of Seneca, Socrates, and Diogenes in *discursos XXIII* and *XLI*; when he addresses paradoxes, such as that between life and death, in *discurso XXIV*; when he questions the nature of man and his place in the world in *discursos XXVII* and *XLI*; and, most notably, when he writes in allegorical form in *discursos XXVII* and *LV*. As analysed in more detail in the following chapter, Andersen has examined the Spanish tendency to philosophise via narrative fiction rather than via philosophical treatise (2008; Robbins 1998: 41), and it seems that *El Criticón* succeeds where the *Agudeza* fails in this respect: the *Agudeza* is not a work of fiction, but nor is it a treatise on rhetoric or a purely philosophical tract. There is a sense in which Gracián was already aware of the superiority of the fictionalised, allegorical form for his subject matter: he writes in his ‘Al lector’ to the *Agudeza* that “pudiera haber dado a este volumen la forma de alguna alegoría” (11), and he repeatedly points out the merits of narrative fiction and

allegory throughout the work (see, for example, *discursos XIX* (334), *XXV* (403), *LV* (567, 570), *LVI* (572, 574), and *LVII* (585)). As such, although the *Agudeza* is the text within which Gracián sets out to theorise upon *agudeza*, the *concepto*, and *ingenio*, it is only with the publication of *El Criticón* that these elements of his philosophy come to be demonstrated in a more clear and engaging way.

### *Conclusion*

Gracián's ideas of *agudeza*, the *concepto*, and *ingenio* carry ramifications for almost every branch of his philosophical thought: this chapter has shown the way in which Gracián's definition of the *concepto* aligns it with the idea of the 'conceptus'. The ontological consequence of this is that existence in the realms of *ser* and *parecer* are mutually dependent: neither is able to exist without the other and there can be no being without being-in-the-world (Andersen 2008: 17). The epistemological consequence of this is that objective knowledge, *ser*, unfiltered by the world, *parecer*, is not possible: the only kind of insight into the universal that man can hope to attain is in the form of temporary and transient aesthetic experience, which must be continually renewed and refreshed.

The way in which man experiences this insight into the universal is the biggest source of disagreement amongst critics: does *admiración* strike man intuitively, instinctively, and spontaneously, without conscious effort on his part, or is man able to provoke the feeling of aesthetic rapture in a more deliberated, artificial, and contrived way, through a rationalised process? Whilst Woods argues for the former and Parker argues for the latter, this chapter has broadly argued for a reconciliation between these two interpretations, as hinted by the text's seemingly paradoxical title as an 'Arte de ingenio': first, man must train his faculty of *ingenio* through deliberated practice; then, *ingenio* will begin to create *conceptos/agudezas* in a more unconscious fashion.

Whilst this shift from practice to perfection is not articulated with clarity within the *Agudeza*, it is demonstrated clearly within *El Criticón*, in which Gracián extends the remit of *ingenio* from ontology, epistemology, and aesthetics, to incorporate the philosophical branch of morality, as examined in the following chapter, which will demonstrate the way in which Gracián conceptualises prudence as a form of *ingenio*. The ontological dependence that the *Agudeza* outlines between the

idea in the mind, the *concepto*, and the manifestation of this idea in the world, the *agudeza*, carries consequences for Aquinas' assertion that prudence must incorporate both deliberation and action: just as the *concepto* must become manifest in the world via an *agudeza*, and just as *ingenio* can be perfected through practice, prudence, too, must be manifest in the world through action, and also reaches its perfection when implemented unconsciously, through intuition and instinct.

Despite the consistently positive framing of *ingenio* within Gracián's work, critics, such as Forcione, have interpreted it pessimistically, as a necessary by-product of a shifting reality, in which reason has been toppled from its throne, uncertainty is rife, and in which *ser* can never be accessed directly. On the other hand, critics such as Blanco, Hidalgo-Serna, and Woods, rightfully assert that this mourning of reason represents "le goût enfantin des hommes pour l'effet décoratif de la régularité", offering the alternative interpretation, in line with Gracián, that "c'est le désordre qui rend la beauté du ciel inépuisable, puisqu'il donne à celui qui le contemple la liberté d'y inventer un nombre indéfini de configurations toujours nouvelles" (Blanco 253). The connections forged by *ingenio* may be largely arbitrary, but they enable man to grant order to God's infinite variety whilst remaining a distinctly finite being which makes up part of that variety. Man will never be able to conceptualise the universe in its totality, but he is able to anchor himself in a fixed position from which he can conceptualise a small portion of it. In other words, objective and atemporal universal knowledge is not a possibility, but temporary insight into the universal via the rapture of aesthetic experience is within man's remit.

## Chapter Five: *El Criticón*

*El Criticón* is a work of narrative fiction written in three parts, published in 1651, 1653, and 1657, respectively. The first part is entitled ‘En la primavera de la niñez y en el estío de la juventud’, the second ‘Juiziosa cortesana filosofía en el otoño de la varonil edad’, and the third ‘En el invierno de la vejez’. As these titles indicate, the work in its totality composes an allegory of man’s life, “el curso de tu vida en un discurso”, as Gracián describes it in the ‘A quien leyere’ of part one (62). The idea of dividing man’s life into four stages which correspond to the four seasons had been present in Gracián’s mind for quite some time, as evidenced in *realce XXV* of *El Discreto*, ‘Culta repartición de la vida de un discreto’, in which he outlines such a division (Correa Calderón 1971: xxxviii; Blecua 12). In the same *realce*, Gracián also presents an alternative, tripartite division of man’s life into three stages of study: “con los muertos” (learning from the words of those who have died, through books), “con los vivos” (learning from those who are still alive, through conversation), and “consigo mismo” (learning from quiet contemplation) (200). As outlined in the ‘A quien leyere’ of part one, Gracián originally intended to write *El Criticón* in two parts, the first evidently covering the spring and summer of man’s life, and the second, in all likelihood, covering the autumn and winter (63). However, as the work developed, Gracián clearly found a tripartite division more suitable, corresponding more closely with the three educational stages he outlines in *realce XXV* of *El Discreto*, rather than with the division of life into four seasons, outlined in the same *realce*. The seeds of *El Criticón* are also present in the *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*, in which Gracián repeatedly points out the merits of allegory, as highlighted in the previous chapter.

*El Criticón* tracks the lives of its two protagonists, Critilo and Andrenio, who meet each other when Critilo is shipwrecked on the Isla Santa Elena, where Andrenio has hitherto been living as a noble savage, trapped in a cave amongst wild animals. Critilo teaches Andrenio how to speak and the pair embark upon the journey to Europe together. Once ashore they are confronted by the difficulty of navigating the world, at the core of which is the disjunction between *ser* and *parecer*. This disjunction allows Gracián to present the world in a satirical manner, pointing out hypocrisy and highlighting the hollowness of his age. The story follows Critilo and Andrenio as they learn to refine their ability to read situations correctly, and as they

finally attain *desengaño* towards the story's close. During this process, they are more often than not accompanied by an allegorical guide who imparts wisdom in some form or other. Together with their guides, Critilo and Andrenio travel through a fantastical and allegorical version of Spain, France, Germany, and Italy. The impetus of the pair's journey through Europe, and through life in general, lies in Critilo's desire to reunite with his former lover, Felisinda, who represents Happiness, and from whom he was separated after a tumultuous youth in Goa. We soon learn that Felisinda is Andrenio's mother and that Critilo is therefore Andrenio's father. The *desengaño* that Critilo and Andrenio achieve near the story's close is that Felisinda/Happiness is not to be found in the earthly world. Rather, the only way to reach Felisinda/Happiness is to earn access to her after death by living virtuously and prudently during life.

As discussed in chapter three, in relation to the treatises, Gracián's work is often marked by the paradox inherent within Christianity which posits the coexistence of free will and Fortune/Providence. This paradox is also present within *El Criticón*, and the contradictory interpretations which can result from it are primarily manifest through the degree to which critics have viewed *El Criticón* as optimistic or pessimistic: does Gracián offer a secular perspective on how to navigate a fatalistic world, concluding that Happiness is impossible and all we can hope to achieve is worldly fame? Or does he offer a programme of action on how man can implement his free will in order to earn Happiness after death, infused with the Christian ideas of salvation and immortality (even if this is not explicitly stated)? Is the world a horrific, incomprehensible, and predetermined labyrinth to be tolerated until the nothingness of death, or is it a complex arena within which God graciously offers man the opportunity to hone his virtue, to implement prudence, and to earn salvation? Just as evidence to support both of these points of view could be gathered from Gracián's treatises, *El Criticón* also provides material to support both sides of these interpretations, leading to ample critical dissent.

For example, Maldonado de Guevara, Romera-Navarro, Blecua, Pelegrín, Andreu Celma, and Andersen,<sup>44</sup> all agree that Gracián presents an optimistic view of

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<sup>44</sup> Maldonado de Guevara: "El optimismo de Gracián es simplemente cristiano" (13).

Romera-Navarro: "Ciertamente era hombre de sincera religiosidad, a pesar de sus faltas, y su ortodoxia es incuestionable" (1938: 18).

Blecua: "Aunque Gracián nada diga y se le haya tachado de no haber dado resolución religiosa al *Criticón*, todo el desengaño de los peregrinos no apunta a otra diana" (26).

life in *El Criticón*, infused with a sense of morality which is based upon Christian orthodoxy, with the possibility of Christian salvation after death. On the other hand, Aranguren, Blüher, Kassier, Blanco, Egginton, Robbins, and García<sup>45</sup> all agree that Gracián presents a pessimistic view of life, devoid of a Christian ethical foundation, with no possibility of Happiness during life, or salvation after death.

One tendency amongst critics who are inclined to see Optimism and adherence to a Christian moral framework in Gracián's works is to concede that there are fewer explicit references to religion than one might expect from a member of the *Compañía de Jesús*, but to argue that this is not indicative of a tendency towards secularity. Rather, these critics believe that Gracián takes the importance of religion for granted and sees no need to impress it upon his reader, whose Catholic orthodoxy is presupposed. For example, Coster argues that Gracián,

No ha hablado de la religión porque supone que el Catolicismo es, para su lector como para él, la base de todo, y no hay necesidad de proclamar a cada instante verdades que se tienen por incontestables ante gentes que no las ponen en duda (163).

And Rabone states that, “while explicitly Christian references are rare, the *Criticón* is not simply a secular work, as the allegory is adapted to fit a Christian position, even if that compatibility is usually left implicit” (168).

It is true that the landscape of *El Criticón* is often nightmarish: clarity is rare, deception is rife, cruelty is widespread, and Critilo and Andrenio's need to sharpen their perceptive faculties is exhaustingly unremitting. Were these aspects the sole

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Pelegrín: “Ce que le texte nous dit de capital, et en profondeur, c'est la profonde harmonie de notre jésuite avec sa Compagnie” (34).

Andreu Celma: “En Gracián descubrimos una visión optimista del hombre [que] resalta la bondad natural del hombre y su capacidad para obtener la salvación mediante las buenas obras” (95).

Andersen: “Aunque la felicidad no se encuentra en la tierra sigue existiendo la posibilidad de conseguir la inmortalidad y de hacer valer la vida” (2008: 233).

<sup>45</sup> Aranguren: “Gracián est foncièrement pessimiste” (283).

Blüher: “La sabiduría de *El Criticón* es amarga, pesimista. Al final de su viaje por la vida, lo que Critilo y Andrenio encuentran es decepción y melancolía [...] En la sabiduría intramundana de Gracián falta la proyección hacia la trascendencia” (558).

Kassier: “Despite the orientation towards a specific goal implicit in a pilgrimage [...] life lacks a coherent sense of direction towards some higher final objective” (23).

Blanco: “Dans *El Criticón* le chapitre final, qui montre les deux protagonistes parvenant à l'île des immortels, à ce séjour désirable entre tous, se déroule dans une atmosphère de déception mélancolique et comporte des épisodes aussi amèrement burlesques de la rêve de don Quichotte dans le caverne de Montesinos” (551).

Egginton: “For Gracián, God does not enter the picture [...] Gracián is writing a secular ethics for those desiring success in this world, and he is not concerned with other-worldly matters” (161).

Robbins: “[Gracián shows a] profound pessimism”, “The imperative to perceive and thereby to evaluate correctly is emphatically not driven by a desire to achieve salvation” (2007: 221; 223).

Gracia: “Gracián is pessimistic and sees the world as a hostile environment where appearances prevail upon truth and virtue” (173).

focus of Gracián's attention, pessimistic interpretations of the text would be wholly justified. However, this chapter will take the view that it is through confrontation with these challenges that Gracián's optimistic programme for navigating the world and for earning salvation emerges. In this way, Gracián converts challenge to opportunity, intertwines the worldly with the other-worldly, accepts and embraces the Christian paradox between free will and Fortune/Providence and, in doing so, depicts God as gracious and generous, rather than as cruel, absent, or synonymous with blind Fortune. For these reasons, Moraleja Juárez takes a balanced view when he states that "el optimismo metafísico-religioso de Gracián tiene..., como contra partida, un pesimismo antropológico-social. Obviamente, el optimismo ocupa una posición superior al del pesimismo" (1999: 122–3). And Romera-Navarro also points out that the coexistence of Optimism and Pessimism in *El Criticón* stems from the paradoxical nature of Christianity itself when he writes that Gracián "ve el mundo tal como es, y no se hace ilusiones sobre la naturaleza humana. Levantado algo el plano de observación, diré que tiene el pesimismo y el optimismo del cristianismo: pesimismo en la vida, optimismo en el fin de la vida" (21). The world of *El Criticón* may be nightmarish and the necessity of repeatedly confronting it may be a heavy burden ("pesimismo en la vida"), but doing so is the only route via which salvation and Happiness after death can be earned ("optimismo en el fin de la vida").

Just as the inherent ambivalence between the Optimism and Pessimism of Christianity holds sway over both Gracián's treatises and *El Criticón*, the same debates which informed an interpretation of Gracián's earlier treatises also hold sway over his later, fictional work: does Gracián endorse Machiavellian self-interest, or does he stress the necessity of cultivating virtue? Does he encourage man to be God-like and detached from the world, or does he encourage engagement with one's surroundings? Are good Fortune and noble birth prerequisites for success, or are hard work and prudence more important? And what role does *ingenio* play in all this?

As with *El Héroe*, *El Político*, *El Discreto*, and the *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*, it is possible when interpreting *El Criticón* to find evidence to support both sides of these questions. However, unlike in the treatises, Gracián displays less ambivalence in these matters in *El Criticón*, which is particularly clear when the refinement of his thought in the *Agudeza* is taken into account. For example, in *El Criticón*, Gracián unequivocally eschews Machiavellianism (see, for example, 1.VII, 165; 1.X, 205; 2.VI, 377; and 2.XII, 504), places a great amount of stress on virtue

(as this chapter will go on to demonstrate), supports engagement with the world (an inevitable consequence of his attitude towards ontology, developed in the *Agudeza*, which stipulates that man is a being-in-the-world and that *ser* and *parecer* are ontologically interdependent), denies that good Fortune and noble birth are sufficient for salvation (see, for example, 1.I, 65–7; 1.V, 124; 2.I, 299; 2.V, 288; 2.VI, 408; 2.X, 480; 3.VIII, 715–7; and 3.XII, 798), and places prudence at the centre of his worldview (as this chapter will also go on to demonstrate). *El Criticón* thus presents a continuation, and the culmination, of Gracián’s views concerning the importance of virtue and prudence, the seeds of which, as we have seen, were planted in his earlier treatises. Despite the impossibility of extracting a complete philosophical system from *El Criticón* (Correa Calderón 1971: xlvi; Robbins 2007: 221), virtue and prudence come to the fore to compose a robust and stable worldview which places the value of moral conduct at its core (Kassier 133; Rabone 166).

Furthermore, if we combine this focus on morality with what we have learned about *agudeza*, the *concepto*, and *ingenio* in the preceding chapter, we come to appreciate that, for Gracián, these elements are not confined solely to the realms of ontology, epistemology, and aesthetics. Rather, as this chapter will go on to exemplify, *ingenio* plays an important role in the process of deciding prudent action: just as the epistemological function of *ingenio* is to reconfigure things already known in order to re-reveal Truth in a novel way, in aesthetic fashion, the moral function of prudence is to reconfigure man’s past experiences and potential futures to reveal the virtuous course of action in the present. *Ingenio* and prudence therefore both concern themselves with forging connections between disparate elements, which must be renewed and refreshed throughout the course of man’s life. In this way, prudence is a form of *ingenio* which, as indicated in the previous chapter through the *Agudeza*’s paradoxical title as an ‘Arte de ingenio’, must be initially implemented rationally and consciously and then reach its perfection when implemented spontaneously and intuitively. Furthermore, just as the activation of *ingenio* and the creation of the *concepto/agudeza* grants temporary insight into universality, using prudence to act virtuously represents a contingent and transient actualisation of the universal which temporarily elevates man himself to the status of a *concepto/agudeza*. Thus Gracián fuses the philosophical branches epistemology, aesthetics, and morality, and fuses knowledge, art, and virtue, which is what critics mean when they refer to Gracián’s “estetización de la vida”, to his “arte de vivir que haga del vivir un arte”, and to the

way in which “a literary style [i.e. wit/*agudeza*] becomes a way of life” (Andreu Celma 253, 282; Robbins 1998: 113, respectively). Again, the seeds of this were planted in the treatises and in the *Agudeza*, and we see them come to their completion in *El Criticón*.

With his focus on a system of morality which elevates the ideas of virtue and prudence, towards the goal of salvation and immortality after death, this chapter will agree that Gracián adopts in *El Criticón* an “implicitly Christian ethical outlook” (Rabone 169) and an “optimismo metafísico-religioso” (Moraleja Juárez 1999: 122), instead of a purely worldly stance which sees fame as the closest to Happiness man can reach, both before and after death, in a pessimistic world of illusion and deceit. This chapter will argue for the former by, first, examining the shift in genre from Gracián’s philosophical and factual treatises to the fictional *El Criticón*; by then analysing part one of *El Criticón*, with a focus on the necessary reconciliation between the characters of Critilo and Andrenio, representing the balance that man must strike between reason and instinct; by analysing part two of *El Criticón*, with a focus on the idea of virtue, and the way in which each instance of virtuous conduct represents a channelling of divinity which temporarily elevates man to the status of a *concepto/agudeza*; and, finally, by analysing part three of *El Criticón*, with a focus on the idea of prudence, and the way in which Critilo and Andrenio hone their *ingenio* throughout the course of the novel, allowing them to refine their skills within the remit of prudence and to develop their implementation of it from a conscious, deliberated, and rationalised process, to a more spontaneous, instinctive, and intuitive act.

#### *Genre: From Treatise to Narrative Fiction*

As highlighted in the previous chapter, in *discurso LV* of the *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* Gracián recounts the allegory in which Verdad and Entendimiento are separated by Mentira, and Verdad finds herself rebutted and rejected. Under the protection of Agudeza, Verdad is encouraged to “azucarar los desengaños”, for the reason that her truths are unpalatable when glimpsed too directly (563). Taking Agudeza’s advice, Verdad learns to present herself using “invenciones”, “rodeos”, and, “estratagemas”, manipulating her *parecer* in order to reveal more effectively her *ser* (563). It appears to be with these guidelines regarding the expression of Truth in

mind that Gracián reflects upon the relationship between form and content, and takes the step in *El Criticón* of disguising his thoughts about human existence in a fictional costume (Andersen 2013: 790; Kassier 4; Robbins 1998: 69). This section will understand narrative fiction to be imaginative and fictionalised writing which, as per Aristotle's *Poetics*, draws upon the illustrative potential of abstracted universals rather than of mimetic particulars. Gracián's use of narrative fiction in *El Criticón* has two noteworthy effects which will be examined in this section: the first concerns the extent to which the reader is implicated in the text, due to the necessity that he engage a different type of reason than that required during the reading of a philosophical or factual tract; the second concerns the distrust of history and of recorded facts as a reliable source of Truth, and the implications this has, in Gracián's worldview, for the effacement of the figure of the *héroe* and the emergence of the figure the *persona*.

Andersen argues that philosophical works, such as Gracián's treatises, create an immediate barrier between the reader and the text due to referential density and linguistic difficulty, and that, "de este modo, siempre va a existir un abismo entre el texto filosófico y su lector, [que] no deja de ser sujeto frente a objeto" (2008: 8). On the other hand, she expresses the belief that "este abismo lo supera la literatura" (2008: 8). For Andersen, literature succeeds where philosophy fails in collapsing the boundary between the reader and the text because literature relies upon the reader's "capacidad de razonar analógica" (2008: 29). This analogical version of reason, Andersen proposes, requires that the reader make connections, empathise, imagine, and project forwards while reading the text. In this way the reader is implicated in the text and is forced to participate in the creation of the narrative, rather than simply observe and absorb the unfolding of philosophical argumentation. In the previous chapter, we saw the way in which Gracián attempts to engage the reader's reason in the *Agudeza* through the technique of structural incoherence. The fictional form of *El Criticón*, arguably, provides a more effective outlet for this activation of the reader's reason.

Andersen differentiates between two versions of reason: reason as "inventivo-lingüístico", associated with imagination and with narrative fiction, and reason as "lógico-especulativo", associated with rationality and with philosophy (2008: 12). In a text such as *El Criticón* both types of reason are required:

Es por una parte, el resultado de un encuentro privado y personal al que se entrega el lector y pone a disposición sus emociones y su imaginación y, por otra parte, el resultado del uso lógico-especulativo de la razón que le permite deducir y sintetizar... Esto es una de las principales razones por las que el texto literario, en nuestra opinión, tiene una fuerza y un potencial que no tiene la doctrina, porque apela al lector a varios niveles y no se limita a la razón conceptual (Andersen 2008: 72–3).

While philosophical and factual texts, such as Gracián's earlier treatises and the *Agudeza*, draw upon the reader's objective and conceptual rationality, literature draws upon this, as well as upon the reader's ability to use their imagination to make connections for themselves. Using the language of Gracián's idiolect, we can say that literature simultaneously engages the reader's *juicio* and *ingenio*, therefore making a double demand upon the reason of the reader and transmitting truths more effectively as a result. Andreu Celma agrees with Andersen's conclusions, stating that "la filosofía racionalista ignora las misteriosas entrañas del hombre. Los abismos del corazón quedan al margen de una razón lógico-matemática que los ignora" (282). And Fernández-Corugedo concurs that in *El Criticón* Gracián succeeds in revealing truths more profoundly than a philosophical tract would allow when he writes that "Gracián parece haber comprendido que el arte literario no puede ir separado de la filosofía (y viceversa) y que revelar sólo un plano de la realidad, el plano racional de la realidad, no lleva a la verdad" (358). In contrast to his earlier, philosophical and factual works, in his 'A quien leyere' to part one of *El Criticón*, Gracián states, "he procurado juntar lo seco de la filosofía con lo entretenido de la invención" (62–3), showing his newfound appreciation of the fact that philosophy and invention, fiction and instruction, *deleitar* and *enseñar*, can go hand-in-hand.

Whilst Andersen describes the way in which narrative fiction engages the reader's "capacidad de razonar analógica", which often activates the reader's sense of empathy in the process of reading, *El Criticón* is not a text which frequently demands the empathy and sympathy of its readers: the characterisation of Critilo and Andrenio is scant, it is hard for the reader to relate to them, and there are few truly heart-wrenching moments within the narrative. Gracián seems to anticipate this potential criticism when he points out in 3.X that his protagonists spend all their time intellectualising and are never shown as human figures who need to carry out normal human activities, such as eating (762). Perhaps for this reason Bell states that "with all his interest in man, there is something a little cold, abstract, and inhuman in [Gracián]", and that his work is intended for "intellectual mankind, and not all of

mankind” (71 and 68–9, respectively). Sympathy, empathy, and making demands on the reader’s emotions were evidently not the channels via which Gracián intended to collapse the barrier between his text and its readers, and to activate his readers’ “capacidad de razonar analógica”. Rather, Gracián utilises narrative fiction, and imaginative reason, to involve the reader in the process of developing his worldview, collapsing the distance between the reader and the novel’s protagonists, and implicating the reader in the creation of the narrative, on a more intellectual, rather than emotional, level: the reader confronts situations alongside Critilo and Andrenio, and judges them based on the same bank of experiences that the two characters have accumulated throughout the narrative. Just as Critilo and Andrenio refine their ability to perceive situations correctly during the course of *El Criticón*, the reader’s capacity to judge is also carefully honed.

The reason why narrative fiction achieves this refinement of judgement more effectively than a philosophical treatise or a factual text is because narrative fiction allows for chronology: Gracián’s worldview unfolds, progresses, and develops in steps which the reader can follow and as a consequence of events which the reader has witnessed alongside the protagonists. Philosophy, on the other hand, presents a fully-formed worldview which exists outside temporality, as universally and statically true. *El Criticón* has its atemporal moments (for example, Andrenio’s existence on the Isla Santa Elena, before meeting Critilo; and the last three *crisis* of part three when Critilo and Andrenio have finished their last day alive and are on the brink of passing into life after death). However, for the most part, the narrative rests upon the interplay between past, present, and future, between memory, actuality, and futurity, all of which are encapsulated in the central idea of prudence. As such, Gracián does not simply expound his theory of prudence, as a philosophical tract would do; he uses narrative fiction, imaginative reason, and progression in time to demonstrate it and to cultivate its practice within his reader. Gracián’s desire to engage the reader in the process of cultivating prudence is explicitly stated in the novel’s closing lines when Critilo and Andrenio are on the verge of entering La Mansión de la Eternidad:

Lo que allí vieron, lo mucho que lograron, quien quisiere saberlo y experimentarlo, tome el rumbo de la virtud insigne, del valor heroico, y llegará a parar al teatro de la fama, al trono de la estimación y al centro de la inmortalidad (3.XII, 812).

In his study of the allegorical technique of *El Criticón*, Kassier further examines the way in which Gracián keeps alert his readers’ capacity for judgement,

both at the macrostructure of the novel as a whole, and at the microstructure of the *crisi*, coming to a similar conclusion regarding both: Gracián prefers to blur the boundaries between one segment of the text and another, rather than to delineate his transitions neatly, frustrating his readers' desire for coherence and harmony. We see this at the macro level in terms of the novel's geographical settings. For example, the protagonists begin their journey in Spain and remain there until well into part two; they cross the border into France towards the end of part two and remain there until shortly into part three; they then enter Germany early in part three before travelling to Italy towards the end of the novel (Kassier 49). Kassier argues that this gives the impression of limits surpassed and denies the reader the order and harmony that devoting each part of the novel to a single geographical location would bring (58).

This effect is repeated on the micro level through the structure of each individual *crisi*. Kassier identifies four sections in each *crisi*: first, each *crisi* opens with a fable which introduces a new theme or moral, which Kassier calls an apologue; then, the material which was abruptly interrupted by the ending of the preceding *crisi* is completed; next, the theme or moral introduced in the apologue is developed; finally, this theme or moral is suspended by the end of the *crisi*, to be resolved in the next (57). Just as the delineation between parts one, two, and three of the novel is blurred by geography, the delineation between *crisis* is blurred by the trans-*crisi* suspension, development, and resolution of thematic material. Kassier argues that the transitions between these stages of each *crisi* often come with no connectives, making them confusing for the reader to follow, with the result that Gracián creates an "intentionally disorienting literary environment" (60). He writes that "the *crisi*'s very structural form itself is an allegorical representation of the confusing, disorienting world through which Andrenio and Critilo, together with the individual who is following their adventures, must make their way" (60). Critilo and Andrenio are forced to navigate a deceitful world in which being duped by *parecer* is a constant threat. Using the structure of his novel and of his chapters, Gracián recreates this feeling of disorientation for his reader. Through deliberate obfuscation and the restriction of understandability, Gracián engages the capacity for judgement of his reader. Whilst the technique of structural incoherence was also implemented in the *Agudeza* towards the aim of activating the reader's reason, it is arguably more effective in narrative fiction, where there is a double demand upon the reader's rational reason and imaginative reason, his *juicio* and his *ingenio*, and not simply

upon his rational reason, the sole faculty upon which philosophical works tend to draw.

This section has mostly considered Gracián's shift from treatise to narrative fiction in terms of a shift from objective, philosophical writing to imaginative, literary writing. However, it is true that Gracián's earlier treatises more accurately straddle the line between philosophy and factual account. For example, in *El Héroe*, *El Político*, and *El Discreto* Gracián frequently illustrates the ideal qualities of the *héroe*, the *político*, and the *discreto* figures with references to particular classical and contemporary historical examples. As such, these treatises participate in the genre of history as much as in that of philosophy, and one of the biggest shifts between them and *El Criticón* is Gracián's change in attitude towards the reliability, and therefore the usefulness, of historical accounts.

Egido has pointed out that Gracián's distrust of history intensifies as the novel continues, with part three demonstrating the most scathing treatment of historians (2000: 195). For example in 3.IV Gracián compares the work of the historian to the deceit carried out by El Charlatán, who makes a crowd agree that a donkey is an eagle, and a dwarf a giant, simply because they do not want to disagree and go against the tide of popular opinion (625–9). In the same way, historians are “manifiestamente mentirosos”, fabricating ‘Truth’ and immortalising nonsense into the historical record, which most blindly accept in order to avoid appearing contrary (633). The result of this is that it is impossible to discern what is true and what is fiction, forcing man to rely upon opinion rather than facts, and leaving the world “bullendo de sofisterías y caprichos” (633). Similarly, in the following *crisi*, 3.V, El Veedor de Todo describes the way in which even the perception of colour changes depending upon who is viewing it, stating that “no había verdaderos colores en los objetos, que el verde no es verde, ni el colorado colorado, sino que todo consiste en las diferentes disposiciones y en la superficie de la luz que las baña” (651). While this may appear to be a reflection upon perspectivism, typical of the Baroque age, Gracián directs this comment more pointedly at historians when he goes on to write that “según concibe cada uno según percibe, así le da el color que quiere conforme al afecto, y no al efecto”, and that “Los más en el mundo son tintoreros y dan el color que les está bien al negocio, a la hazaña, a la empresa y al suceso” (652). Again, the result of this mixing of factual record with personal motivations (rather than with individual points of view) is that “no hay poder averiguar cosa de cierto” (652). Finally, in 3.VIII, we

witness a monster throwing history books into La Cueva de la Nada for the reason that “no corresponde lo que éstos escriben a lo que aquéllos obran”, highlighting again the disjunction between historical action and the way in which it has been recorded by historians (720).

In *El Criticón* Gracián satirises historians because he realises that history has come to be manipulated and fictionalised according to the motivations of the person who is writing it (Egido 2000: 230). As a consequence, accounts recording the deeds of great historical figures have become unreliable sources of information, whose deceit is made worse by the charade of objectivity. As such, with *El Criticón*, Gracián removes himself from the charade of history completely, choosing instead two dehumanised and universal protagonists, who lack historical particularity, but who simultaneously represent everyman, of every time and place. Robbins describes how Gracián prefers “a genre which does not seek to deceive with believable characters and events”, and the way in which “a true representation, one that seeks to expose the world as it actually is, will therefore not be realist in approach” (1998: 68). Gracián’s abandonment of history and factual account may be interpreted as evidence of his Pessimism and paranoia regarding our ability to record and to access Truth. However, it seems clear that his intention in shifting to narrative fiction, and his shift to two overtly fictionalised characters, represents an attempt to reveal Truth more profoundly and authentically than a ‘truthful’ historical record ever could, in accordance with the precepts laid out in Aristotle’s *Poetics* (Egido 2000: 136).

In the final *crisi* of *El Criticón* Gracián depicts the Soldado de Fortuna, who approaches Mérito, the gatekeeper of La Mansión de la Eternidad, and tries to gain entrance. Believing himself to be a modern-day hero, superior to all the heroes who already inhabit the Mansión, the Soldado de Fortuna is shocked to be turned away by Mérito on the following basis,

Y viendo [Mérito] que no quedaba héroe con héroe y que llegaba a meter escrúpulos en una cosa tan delicada como la fama de tantos y tan insignes varones, vino a partidos con él y pactaron que volviese al mundo acompañado de un par de famosos escritores que examinasen de nuevo los autores de su renombre, los pregoneros de su fama, los que le habían celebrado de Cid moderno y Marte novel; y que si se hallasen constantes en lo dicho, al punto sería admitido, que assí se había platicado con otros en caso de duda (3.XII, 809).

Here, Mérito displays a distrust of the Soldado’s *heroicidad* and of the writers who recorded his feats. Mérito’s observation, “que no quedaba héroe con héroe”, has been interpreted by critics, such as Maldonado de Guevara and Pelegrín, as evidence of

Gracián's lack of belief in the very possibility of *heroicidad*, contrasting starkly with his earlier works, the earliest of which was entitled precisely, *El Héroe* (25; 33 and 212, respectively). Indeed, Maldonado de Guevara tracks the history of this phrasal structure, and goes so far as to argue that it implies complete negation: man has no hope of becoming a hero and has no possibility of raising himself out of his status as a nobody (26–7).<sup>46</sup> Such a reading of one of the final scenes of *El Criticón* reduces the message of the entire novel to one of hopelessness concerning man's ability to raise himself out of nothingness, to progress, to perfect himself, and to achieve salvation.

While Gracián's shift away from history indicates an abandonment of the figure of the *héroe*, it is also true that his turn towards narrative fiction allows a different idealised figure to emerge: the *persona*. As examined in chapter three, the *héroe* is a valiant figure, most likely of noble birth, who carries out great deeds, and has them recorded by others. The *persona* of *El Criticón*, on the other hand, is quietly contemplative, taking action and making decisions based upon experience, whose focus is on the cultivation of interior moral value over the outward projection of power. We see the superiority of the latter during 2.IV when Critilo, guided by El Varón Alado, enters El Museo del Discreto, hoping to meet Sofisbella (Wisdom), Andrenio having been led astray by Cécrope. As he moves through the rooms of El Museo del Discreto, Memoria leads Critilo into a room inhabited by Historia:

Aquí hallaron otra bien estremada ninfa que tenía la metad del rostro arrugado, muy de vieja, y la otra metad fresco, muy de joven. Estaba mirando a dos hazes, a lo presente y a lo pasado, que lo porvenir remitíalo a la providencia (366–7).

Historia has two faces, one looking at the past and another looking at the present, and she does not concern herself with the future. She is depicted holding several feathers, “que con una sola que entregó a uno le hizo volar y remontarse hasta los dos coluros”, giving her the power to decide who achieves fame and who is granted eternal life through historical record (367).

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<sup>46</sup> The idea of the impossibility of *heroicidad* is also present in 1.VI, 128, when Quirón responds to Andrenio's disbelief that he can see no men upon entering Madrid (“No me espanto – dixo él [Quirón] –, que no es éste siglo de hombres; digo, aquellos famosos de otros tiempos... Ya no hay tales heroes en el mundo, ni aun memoria de ellos); and in 1.XI, 237, during a discussion with El Cortesano on books of the ‘mirrors for princes’ genre (“En aquel buen tiempo cuando los hombres lo eran, digo buenos hombres, fueran admirables estas reglas; pero ahora, en los tiempos que alcançamos, no valen cosa”).

However, despite this power, Critilo is soon ushered out of Historia's room and eventually led by Juizio into the room of Moral Filosofía. In contrast to the stress placed on fame in the room of Historia, the room of Moral Filosofía is presented as one in which one's interiority takes precedence, where souls are healed, and where one discovers "los grandes preceptos de la prudencia" (374). While Historia has two faces, looking at the past and the present, we know that prudence incorporates three temporal planes, the past, the present, and the future. As such, via prudence, man is able to use his past in order to look beyond his present circumstances, and to lay the groundwork for future success. Egido elaborates on this idea when she writes that "sin la prudencia no se entiende realmente la historia, pues si esta última tiene, como vimos, una cara que mira al pasado y otra al presente, ésta tiene además la tercera, que mira al futuro y da sentido a las otras dos" (2000: 232). Whilst Historia focuses on the present and on the achievement of worldly success through fame, moral philosophy and prudence incorporate the planes within which Historia functions, and add to this, also projecting forward into the remit of other-worldly success and salvation. For Gracián's *persona*, interior morality has come to take precedence over exterior reputation, success in life after death has come to take precedence over worldly success, and cultivating one's moral worth has come to take precedence over inscribing oneself in the historical record. For this reason, Kassier states that in *El Criticón*, "successfully being a *persona* is itself now the pinnacle of heroism" (141), and Gambin argues that virtue and *heroicidad* "ya no van separadas en *El Criticón*" (72), points of view which are also shared by Fernández-Corugedo and Andersen (295 and 176, respectively).

In this sense, Gracián's shift in genre from factual treatise, whether considered as philosophy or history, to narrative fiction is closely linked to the stress he places on morality and on prudence in *El Criticón*. The implication of the reader's "capacidad de razonar analógica" (Andersen 2008: 29), the imaginative use of reason, *ingenio*, encourages the reader to approach the text in the same way in which its protagonists must approach the world: using experience to make connections in order to learn to read situations and their outcomes correctly. This imbues *El Criticón* with a practicality which is lacking in purely philosophical texts. Likewise, Gracián's suspicion towards history and his elevation of narrative fiction reveals the shift in his focus from earning public esteem for its own sake to cultivating oneself as a *persona* through the practice of moral philosophy which, while incorporating history and the

fame it grants, does not see this as an end in itself. Rather, the end of moral philosophy is interior moral worth which will be rewarded by success in life after death. Gracián's activation of both types of the reader's reason, *juicio* and *ingenio*, while reading *El Criticón* places them on the right path towards becoming a *persona* themselves, and it is the shift from treatise to narrative fiction which allows this concern for the reader's moral status to come to the fore.

*Part One of "El Criticón": Critilo and Andrenio Combined*

Part one of *El Criticón* recounts Critilo's shipwreck on the Isla Santa Elena, where he meets Andrenio, and the pair's entrance into society after making the journey across the sea to Spain together. For the most part, the first three *crisis* deal with Andrenio's discovery of the world after having been trapped in a cave for all his life. Critilo then tells the story of his youth in Goa as they travel to Spain, during which Andrenio also undertakes a period of study. Having arrived in Spain, the following *crisis* comprise Andrenio's introduction into the chaos of the world. The pair then split up, Critilo going to seek the help of Artemia, while Andrenio remains trapped in Falimundo's court. Reunited, they encounter the Venta de Volusia together, before another separation takes Andrenio to Falsirena. Falsirena reveals that Felisinda is Andrenio's mother and Critilo his father. She also reveals that Felisinda has travelled to Germany. Critilo joins Andrenio to stay at Falsirena's palace, and after another separation, the pair head to La Feria de Todo el Mundo, after which part one ends.

It is in part one that we are first introduced to the characters of Andrenio and Critilo. As the Greek roots of their names suggest, Andrenio represents natural man and Critilo represents learned man (ἄνθρωπος [aner], meaning 'man', and κριτής [kritēs], meaning 'judgement'), with each pertaining to their different realms, "el uno en lo juizioso, y el otro en lo humano" (1.I, 69). However, as the following analysis of part one will argue, it is not the case that Critilo is always correct and fully self-sufficient, and Andrenio always wrong and deficient. Kassier points out that Covarrubias' 1611 definition of 'crítico' describes it as rigorous but fair judgement (11),<sup>47</sup> but also that in the 1729 *Diccionario de autoridades*, the word had gained negative connotations,

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<sup>47</sup> "Crítico, vale tanto como judicial, ô judiciario, del verbo, *crineim*, à iudicando, y de aqui se dixeron criticos los que juzgan, y examinan con rigor las poesias, y las escrituras, y obras de otros" (171).

and had come to incorporate a certain level of malicious pedantry.<sup>48</sup> Given the source of Critilo's name in the Greek root of this word, it transpires throughout *El Criticón* that Critilo's attitude straddles the line between the positive Covarrubias and the negative *Diccionario de autoridades* definitions: Critilo, rightly, judges situations, but his judgement can sometimes be erroneous and extreme. Similarly, Andrenio's nature is also twofold: he represents instinct and brutishness, but also candid innocence and natural ingenuousness (Kassier 13–4). As part one demonstrates, both protagonists incorporate desirable characteristics, and it is only when combined that they succeed in balancing their most undesirable traits, namely extreme naivety and extreme caution. As Kassier states,

Without the 'human', natural, vital element embodied in Andrenio, Critilo's artful, critical nature must expire. Conversely, without the artful and judicious nature embodied in Critilo, Andrenio's ingenuous naturalness will be dragged down and extinguished by vice (19).

The first three *crisis* of part one are primarily concerned with Andrenio recounting his experience of discovering the world after having exited his cave on the Isla Santa Elena for the first time thanks to an earthquake which made his escape possible, with Critilo commenting upon his reactions, encouraging that which he finds promising, and gently correcting any errors of interpretation. Noteworthy in these opening *crisis* is Andrenio's innate ability to conceptualise himself as a thinking subject, his ability to marvel at the universe and his realisation of his relatively lowly place within it, and his ability to deduce the existence of a divine creator from the evidence provided by nature. Critilo's role in these opening *crisis* is often limited to making encouraging comments about that which Andrenio has already concluded himself, highlighting the positive conceptualisation that Gracián holds of Andrenio's innate ingenuity.

For example, in 1.I, after having been taught language by Critilo, Andrenio gives an account of his life on the Isla Santa Elena. He describes being trapped in the cave and his initial passive acceptance of this, before becoming aware that he, as a human being, was different to the other animals which surrounded him. He states,

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<sup>48</sup> “Crítico. Se llama tambien la persona que habla ò escribe con afectación, usando de frases y palabras obscuras y poco practicadas. Lat. *Cultioris sermonis ineptus affectator*. FLORENC. Mar. tom. 1. Prolog. Los *críticos* llaman à los tales Predicadores entendidos, y parece los llamaran mejor los desentendidos, pues nadie hai que los entienda. NIEREMB. Epist. 76. Llaman los Españoles *Crítico* al que habla mui artificiosa y precisamente. QUEV. Cult. Latinip. En las visitas, al levantarse echará menos un Plutarcho, que se le cayó de la manga: tendrá críticos de faltriquera como huevos, y Autores de falda como perrillos” (662).

A los principios no sentía tanto aquel penoso encerramiento, antes con las interiores tinieblas del ánimo desmentía las exteriores del cuerpo, y con la falta de conocimiento disimulaba la carencia de la luz, si bien algunas veces brujuleaba unas confusas vislumbres que dispensaba el cielo, a tiempos, por lo más alto de aquella infausta caverna. Pero, llegando a cierto término de crecer y de vivir, me saltó de repente en un tan extraordinario ímpetu de conocimiento, un tan grande golpe de luz y de advertencia, que revolviendo sobre mí comencé a reconocermé haciendo una y otra reflexión sobre mi propio ser: ¿Qué es esto, decía, soy o no soy? Pero, pues vivo, pues conozco y advierto, ser tengo. Mas, si soy, ¿quién soy yo?, ¿quién me ha dado este ser y para qué me lo ha dado?; para estar aquí metido, grande infelicidad sería. ¿Soy bruto como éstos? Pero no, que observo entre ellos y entre mí palpables diferencias (71).

Andrenio's realisation of his difference from the animals around him comes as "un tan extraordinario ímpetu de conocimiento, un tan grande golpe de luz y de advertencia", indicating the intuitive nature of his conceptualisation of himself as a thinking subject: "pues vivo, pues conozco y advierto, ser tengo". Andersen and Moraleja Juárez have pointed out that this moment corresponds to Descartes' articulation of the maxim, 'Cogito, ergo sum', 'I think, therefore I am', and represents Andrenio's becoming aware of his existence as an individuated subject (2008: 213; 1999: 116, respectively). However, both critics also point out that, unlike Descartes, Gracián's concern does not stop here. He continues: "pero, pues vivo, pues conozco y advierto, ser tengo. Mas, si soy, ¿quién soy yo?, ¿quién me ha dado este ser y para qué me lo ha dado?". While Descartes was interested in finding something which was clearly and indubitably true, and finds this in the existence of one's thinking self, Gracián sets the existence of the self aside as a given, and quickly proceeds to ask the questions he finds more urgent: who am I? Who created me? Why was I created? Why am I here and what is my purpose? In other words, Andrenio sets metaphysical musing aside and swiftly moves on to questions of morality (Andersen 2008: 213).

While Descartes carefully discovered the truth of the existence of the thinking self through deliberated philosophical contemplation, Andrenio stumbles upon the truth of his own existence spontaneously and intuitively, highlighting the stress that Descartes and Gracián place upon rationality and intuition respectively. Andersen teases out this difference when she writes that,

The consequences of the Cartesian conclusion are well known: man became at large a thinking thing and thinking was to be understood as logical-rationalistic, allowing no elements of imagination or invention, and the body was limited to being the host that houses the mind. The existence of the Cartesian thinking 'I' is preserved solely in undoubted knowledge and cannot depend on things of which the 'I' is unaware; and, therefore, cannot in any way depend on things invented by the imagination. Invention is excluded from the Cartesian definition of a thinking thing. In Gracián, however, invention and imagination are, if not principal faculties, primary aspects of man's thinking (2013: 793).

Andrenio, as the unwitting recipient of intuitive knowledge, shows himself to be a partisan of a way of thinking that prioritises invention and imagination. A consequence of this difference in outlooks is that Andrenio is necessarily outwards looking, finding inspiration in his surroundings and through comparison with other beings: it is through comparing his physical limitations to the agility of the animals amongst whom he lives that Andrenio realises his lack of liberty in the cave (71–2) (Hidalgo-Serna 161). A Cartesian thinker, on the other hand, distrusts exteriority and looks inwards, to the thinking self, for Truth. This indicates that, for Gracián, man is connected to the world which surrounds him, and that both the world and man only have meaning through this connection. Man and the world, interiority and exteriority, *ser* and *parecer*, are therefore ontologically interdependent, as was established in the *Agudeza*, and summarised by Andersen when she states that Gracián “comprende al hombre como un ser con mundo, un ser-en-el-mundo” (2008: 42, 167, 213; 2013: 795). Man and the world form a complementary relationship and, for this reason, Andrenio quickly moves beyond the obvious truth of his own existence to ask more pressing questions regarding the way in which he should interact with the world. Moreover, he does this instinctively, prior to meeting Critilo.

The following *crisi* (1.II) provides further evidence of Andrenio’s innate ingenuity but also of his susceptibility to error. In this *crisi* Andrenio shows his natural skill for perceiving novelty in the world, describing the way in which, upon exiting his cave and seeing the world for the first time, “estuve casi un día insensible, imoble y como muerto, cuando más vivo”, and explaining that “aún me dura, y durará siempre, el espanto, la admiración, la suspensión y el pasmo que me ocuparon toda el alma” (76–7). Andrenio here describes an overwhelming experience of *admiratio* when encountering the world for the first time, which is akin to aesthetic rapture. Critilo, with the benefit of experience, knows that man’s initial *admiración* upon discovering the world is often short-lived and warns Andrenio that “vamos passando, desde el nacer al morir sin reparar en la hermosura y perfección de este universo; pero los varones sabios vuelven atrás, renovando el gusto y contemplando cada cosa con novedad en el advertir, si no en el ver” (77). Andrenio, however, without this insight, and as examined in the previous chapter, becomes obsessed with the sun, stating, “todo el día...empleé en él, contemplándose ya en sí, ya en los reflexos de las aguas, olvidado de mí mismo” (79). Taking into account the Platonic antecedent of this

scene, we can appreciate that the sun for Andrenio represents Truth, perfect knowledge, the source of all *admiración*, and God himself (Andersen 2008: 256). The implication here is that, when man ceases to find novelty in the world, he sets his sights elsewhere, to the kind of novel and *admiratio*-inducing knowledge to which he can never be privy: knowledge of God himself. This obsession functions as a distraction which prevents man, and here Andrenio, from revitalising his admiration and from participating fully in the wonder of the earthly world, which constitutes his remit.

Nevertheless, Andrenio manages to overcome his obsession with the sun/God upon the appearance of the night sky, stating, “volví presto a resucitar entre nuevas admiraciones a un cielo coronado de luminarias, haziendo fiesta a mi contento” (79). The following scene, again extensively examined in the previous chapter, in which Critilo explains to Andrenio that the stars are dispersed chaotically in the night sky because they conform to “otra más importante correspondencia” (81) than that of superficial uniformity, reiterates Critilo’s idea about the necessity of regenerating the novelty that one sees in the world after one’s initial fascination with it has worn off. He states that “se nos haze cada noche nuevo el cielo y nunca enfada el mirarlo: cada uno proporciona las estrellas como quiere” (81). Andrenio, rightly, is overwhelmed by the wonder of the world. However, his obsession with the sun hints at his susceptibility to losing this sense of wonderment and to becoming engrossed in unhealthy and unrealistic epistemological aspirations. Critilo brings Andrenio back down to earth by explaining that, rather than aspiring for divine and universal knowledge which is beyond his remit, it is instead the job of man to renew continually and artificially his sense of wonder towards the world, by using *ingenio* to find new ways to perceive, connect, and illuminate the variety of creation. This refreshes one’s sense of *admiración*, recreates aesthetic rapture, and, ultimately, allows man to bask temporarily in the glory of God. For this reason, Critilo states that,

El sol es claro espejo de Dios y de sus divinos atributos, la luna [and the night sky in general] es del hombre y de sus humanas imperfecciones: ya crece, ya mengua; ya nace, ya muere; ya está en su lleno, ya en su nada, nunca permaneciendo de un estado; no tiene luz de sí, partícipala del sol, eclípsala la tierra cuando se le interpone...es mudable, defectuosa, manchada, inferior, pobre, triste, y todo se le origina de la vezindad con la tierra (82).

Just as the apologue to this *crisi* stresses that man must use “la grandeza de su ánimo”, whilst never forgetting “la ruindad de su cuerpo”, in the process of “reconociendo en todas las maravillas criadas las perfecciones divinas y passando de las criaturas al Criador” (74), Critilo stresses to Andrenio that he must inhabit his proper place within creation: man is not divine, but nor is he wholly animalistic, and he must use his liminal status to recognise and to revere God.<sup>49</sup> The fact that 1.II ends with Andrenio describing his hunger, a particularly bodily concern, suggests that Critilo has, for the time being, succeeded in steering Andrenio’s sights away from obsessions with the sun/the divine (82–3).

While the first *crisis* of *El Criticón* are primarily dedicated to unveiling Andrenio’s character, in 1.IV Critilo uses the boat journey from the Isla Santa Elena to Spain to tell Andrenio the story of his own background, and through his revelations we learn that he too has his flaws. Critilo was born during a boat journey to India, where his wealthy parents were travelling to live. He states: “dicen que nací en el mar, y lo creo, según es la inconstancia de mi fortuna” (99). Critilo cites his birth at sea as the reason for his impetuous and reckless youth, during which he depended upon fortuitous turns of Fortune and lived “tan sin freno de razón” (105), squandering his parents’ money, and lacking “los verdaderos arreos, que son la virtud y el saber” (105). Critilo meets Felisinda and falls in love with her. Felisinda’s brother dies, leaving her the heir to her parents’ wealth, and causing a lot of suitors to come forward. When Felisinda’s parents choose one of these suitors for her to marry, Critilo kills him, and he is put in prison, while Felisinda and her parents leave India to live in Spain. Critilo recognises that his misfortune has been caused by his dependence on Fortune, his refusal to take responsibility for his life, and his failure to activate his free will, which he highlights when he laments, “me dexé llevar de las olas al albedrío de mi desesperada fortuna. Tirana ella una y mil vezes” (111).

As a result, while in prison, Critilo changes tack and undertakes a period of contemplative study, corresponding to the phase of speaking “con los muertos” outlined in *realce XXV* of *El Discreto*. Critilo describes the change of heart he experienced in prison when he states,

Lo que me acarreó de males la riqueza, me restituyó en bienes la pobreza. Puédolo dezir con verdad, pues aquí hallé la sabiduría (que hasta entonces no la había conocido), aquí el desengaño, la experiencia y la salud del cuerpo y alma. Viéndome sin amigos vivos, apelé a

<sup>49</sup> The next *crisi* reiterates this idea. For example, in 1.III, 86–7 and 89–90.

los muertos, di en leer, comencé a saber y a ser persona (que hasta entonces no había vivido la vida racional, sino bestial), fui llenando el alma de verdades y de prendas, conseguí la sabiduría y con ella el bien obrar, que ilustrado una vez el entendimiento, con fazilidad endereza la ciega voluntad: él quedó rico de noticias y ella de virtudes. Bien es verdad que abrí los ojos cuando no hubo ya que ver, que assí acontece de ordinario. Estudié las nobles artes y las sublimes ciencias, entregándome con afición especial a la moral filosofía, pasto del juicio, centro de la razón y vida de la cordura (1.IV, 109).

Stripped of his riches and opulent lifestyle, Critilo turns to “sabiduría”, “desengaño”, “experiencia”, and “la salud del cuerpo y alma”. He turns towards study with the aim of becoming a “persona”, which he characterises as knowing to “bien obrar”, through the taming of “la ciega voluntad”, which then leads to “virtudes”. Naturally, in this process, “la moral filosofía” interested him most. We therefore see Critilo take control of his moral status through the cultivation of virtue, which necessitates using the will to actively make virtuous decisions, instead of leaving one’s moral status up to chance by placing it in the hands of Fortune.

Nevertheless, contemplative study is not enough and Critilo has one last twist of fate to overcome: sent for by Felisinda, who admired his valour in killing a rival suitor, Critilo is boarded on to a ship to take him to Spain when the captain, enticed by the possibility of stealing Critilo’s riches, throws him overboard. “Luchando con las olas, contrastando los vientos y más los desaires de su fortuna” (1.I, 65), Critilo is finally united with Andrenio when he is shipwrecked on the Isla Santa Elena, and the dynamic of complementarity between the pair is activated. This is indicated through Andrenio’s depiction as a kind of religious saviour for Critilo who, “entre la muerte y la vida, hecho víctima de su fortuna”, is saved by “un gallardo joven, ángel al parecer [Andrenio]” (1.I, 67), after which Critilo “fixó sus ojos en el cielo, rindiendo agradecimientos (1.I, 67–8). As Andersen too points out, “si no fuera por Andrenio, Critilo se habría muerto” (2008: 209).

After having established Andrenio and Critilo’s natural dispositions in the first four *crisis* of the novel, in 1.V, having arrived in Spain, Gracián consolidates the idea of their necessary reconciliation, and indeed sets out, at this early stage, the lesson of his text, that it will take Critilo and Andrenio a lifetime, the entire course of the novel, to assimilate and to implement of their own accord. This lesson concerns *medianía* (the Aristotelian Golden Mean), artifice, *ingenio*, prudence, and immortality. This *crisi* continues the tone shift which began in 1.IV, in which, as they approached Europe, Critilo began to warn Andrenio of the deceitfulness of the world (see, for example, 1.IV, 99, 100, 102). In 1.V, Andrenio sees this in action when he

witnesses La Mala Inclinación leading children to a valley to be eaten by wild beasts, and the efforts of Razón to save as many as she could. Immediately after witnessing this scene, Critilo and Andrenio arrive at a crossroads:

Llegaron a aquella tan famosa encruzijada donde se divide el camino y se diferencia el vivir: estación célebre por la dificultad que hay, no tanto de parte del saber cuanto del querer, sobre qué senda y a qué mano se ha de echar. Viose aquí Critilo en mayor duda, porque siendo la tradición común ser dos los caminos (el plausible, de la mano izquierda, por lo fácil, entretenido y cuesta abaxo; y al contrario el de mano derecha, áspero, desapacible y cuesta arriba), halló con no poca admiración que eran tres los caminos, dificultando más su elección (1.V, 120).

Rabone has suggested that the preceding episode between La Mala Inclinación and Razón, representing bestial passion and reason respectively, gives Critilo and Andrenio, as well as the reader, the impression that the subsequent crossroads they face is going to be between two extremes, one of which is wholly positive, one of which is wholly negative (181–2). However, Gracián disrupts this expectation by confronting his protagonists with not two onwards paths, but with three, representing two negative extremes, and one desirable middle way. If we continue to intertwine the two episodes, we see that Gracián is offering a path which represents a harmonious reconciliation between passion (La Mala Inclinación) and reason (Razón), and between the natural dispositions of Andrenio and Critilo.

That the two protagonists should aim to follow this middle path is indicated by a central column, described by Andrenio as “aquel maravilloso oráculo de toda la vida” (123), which is ornately engraved with scenes exemplifying moderation, alongside captions such as “medio hay en las cosas; tú no vayas por los extremos”, “vé por el medio, y correrás seguro”, “¡vuela por el medio!”, and “huye en todo la demasía” (121–2). However, Gracián also describes beside this middle path a pile of stones, “el misterioso montón de Mercurio” (121), referencing the custom for travellers to leave stones beside statues of Mercury, as an offering of thanks to the god of travellers for the wisdom they have acquired along their journey. Rabone also points out that these stones symbolise the lots cast by the gods when they pardoned Mercury for the murder of Argos, a murder which has been considered to represent the triumph of reason over passion (182). We therefore see that, while the third, middle path represents a reconciliation between passion and reason, Gracián seems to be implying subtly that reason tends to occupy a superior position in this partnership.

Nevertheless, passion plays its role and is not to be eradicated completely. Instead, one must learn to use it appropriately, depending upon the circumstances. This ability to draw appropriately upon one's faculties based upon particular contexts is represented by Prudencia, who is depicted at the head of the ornate column: "remataba la Prudencia como reina y en sus manos tenía una preciosa corona con este lema: '*Para el que ama la mediocridad de oro*'. Leíanse otras muchas inscripciones que formaban laços y servían de difiniciones al Artificio y al Ingenio" (122). While passion is instinctual and unthinking, reason is deliberated and self-reflexive. Prudence, artifice, and *ingenio* enable man to distance himself from his instinct, to reflect upon it, to harness it when appropriate, and to correct it artificially when necessary. The preceding chapter demonstrated the way in which *ingenio* can be triggered by artifice and rationality, as well as by instinct and intuition. The contrived route via which *ingenio* can be activated is what Critilo was referencing in 1.II when he described the necessity that man artificially recreate a sense of novelty when viewing the world, and it is what Artemia carries out in 1.VIII and 1.IX when she turns beasts into *personas* using the power of artifice. However, this conscious self-reflexivity, for most, represents the hardest path and they instead choose to take the route of extreme passion, or extreme reason. However, Critilo and Andrenio wisely choose the path of "una prudente y feliz medianía", and, as soon as they do so, experience "una notable alegría interior y una grande satisfacción de la conciencia", with Andrenio claiming that "este camino más parece que nos lleva al cielo que al mundo" (125). To which Critilo responds, "assí es...porque son las sendas de la eternidad, y aunque vemos metidos en nuestra tierra, pero muy superiores a ella, señores de los otros y vezinos a las estrellas" (125). In this way, Gracián connects the middle way between passion and reason, the exercise of prudence using artifice and *ingenio*, and "eternidad", indicating a worldview in which a life prudently lived is rewarded by life after death.<sup>50</sup>

In the next *crisi*, 1.VI, Critilo and Andrenio enter Madrid guided by Quirón. Here, the world is depicted as a *mundo al revés*, where men have feet for heads and heads for feet (133), where soldiers create war to keep themselves in a job (142), and where men live their lives against natural chronology, starting their day under the

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<sup>50</sup> Noteworthy is that Gracián continues to use the image of the stars and the firmament to illustrate the way in which *ingenio* works, as examined in the previous chapter. Here, prudence, the moral application of *ingenio*, is also shown to lead "a las estrellas".

night sky and going to bed at dawn (145). This leads Andrenio to exclaim in horror that “hasta el cielo me parece que está trabucado y que el tiempo anda al revés” (145), and prompts him to wish he could go backwards “a [su] cueva y a [sus] fieras, pues no hay otro remedio” (148). This *crisi* allows Gracián to depict the consequences of not choosing the middle path, and of instead choosing one of the extremes, the consequence being that the development and progress of man’s perfectibility, achieved through the repeated implementation of prudence during the course of one’s lifetime, is stunted. Critilo points out to Andrenio that returning to his cave on the Isla Santa Elena “es lo que ya no se puede...no hay por donde volver a baxar ni otro remedio que passar adelante” (147), and Quirón connects the necessity of continual forwards movement with virtue and with moral status, explaining that “los más de los mortales, en vez de ir adelante en la virtud, en la honra, en el saber, en la prudencia y en todo, vuelven atrás. Y assí, muy pocos son los que llegan a ser personas” (134). Gracián’s reversal of natural chronology in this *crisi* leads to the conclusion that virtue and prudence are things which come into existence in time, through a process of continually moving forward. Furthermore, Quirón relates this to the lesson depicted in the crossroads episode of the previous *crisi* when he states that,

Y es cosa de notar que, siendo el hombre persona de razón, lo primero que executa es hazerla a ella esclava del apetito bestial. Deste principio se originan todas las demás monstruosidades, todo va al revés en consecuencia de aquel desorden capital: la virtud es perseguida, el vicio aplaudido; la verdad muda, la mentira trilingüe; los sabios no tienen libros y los ignorantes librerías enteras... (146).

Gracián points out that the first thing that man must do is learn to control his bestial passions by tempering them with reason. If he does not do so, his ability to demonstrate virtue and prudence is primordially impeded and, instead of becoming a *persona*, he will shrink back into nothingness. In other words, virtue and prudence, and one’s status as a *persona*, come into being through development and progress, and are defined by regeneration and repetition in time.

As stated, these lessons, set out very early by Gracián within *El Criticón*, are not immediately assimilated by Critilo and Andrenio, and the entirety of the novel constitutes their process of learning them, pivotally, through their own experience. The first instance of this is in 1.VII, when Proteo has led the pair to La Fuente de los Engaños and we see a clear example of Critilo and Andrenio’s differing reactions to situations arise. Upon approaching the fountain, Andrenio, exhausted and thirsty from

travelling, immediately wants to use the water to rinse his mouth and wipe his eyes, while Critilo, observing the negative effect that the water is having on those who have drunk from the fountain, warns him against doing so, observing, “bien puede ser veneno, que aquí todo es de temer”, and imploring, “créeme y remítele siempre a la experiencia” (155). However, Andrenio does not learn from observation, does not reflect on cause and effect, and drinks from the fountain, unthinkingly following his instinct. This scene carries Biblical connotations of Original Sin, and we read at this point: “al desdichado Andrenio, una sola gota que tragó (que la demás se la hizo verter Critilo) le hizo tal operación, que quedó vazilando siempre en la virtud” (159). Andrenio’s inability to reflect self-consciously, and to temper his instinct here condemns him to a life of error when it comes to cultivating virtue. Critilo then instructs Andrenio, “no te apartes un punto de mi lado si no quieres perderte” (161). The instruction that Andrenio stick closely to Critilo in order not to lose himself demonstrates the superiority of reason that Gracián had initially implied through the reference to the “montón de Mercurio” during the crossroads episode of 1.V (121). In this way, Critilo and reason are shown to be superior to Andrenio and instinct, due to the curse of error that has been cast upon the latter. Furthermore, just as Andrenio was presented as a spiritual saviour to Critilo during his shipwreck on the Isla Santa Elena, this scene establishes Critilo as a type of spiritual saviour for Andrenio in return, committed to protecting him from his tendency to fall into vice.

While this reveals Andrenio to be dependent upon Critilo in a more obvious and fundamental way than Critilo is dependent upon Andrenio, we see in 1.X of part one that Critilo’s deliberated approach can also be excessive. In this *crisi*, after saying goodbye to Artemia, who emphasised the importance of supplementing one’s nature with artifice (see, for example, 1.VIII, 171 and 1.X, 207), the pair come across Volusia, representing Voluptas, the goddess of sensual pleasure, who ties travellers with the fetters of their choice. While some choose diamonds, gold, pearls, women, or flowers, Critilo “dixo que le atassen a él con cintas de libros, que pareció bien extraordinaria atadura, pero al fin lo era” (216). Just as an obsession with greed or lust represents the fatal flaw of others, Critilo’s hamartia lies in an excessive esteem towards learning, which, when taken to extremes, functions as an impediment just as much as any other flaw (Rabone 191). The consequence of this excessive esteem of reason is demonstrated when the pair are then led to La Venta de Volusia, which Andrenio happily enters. Critilo, on the other hand, displays his tendency towards

caution when he states, “yo he de entrar por donde los otros salen, haziendo entrada de la salida: nunca pongo la mira en los principios, sino en los fines” (219). While Critilo’s refusal to enter the inn via the normal route may appear to be the wise choice (Rabone 191), it is his lack of experience of what is inside the building which subsequently leads to his inability to rescue Andrenio from inside. He states, while calling upon El Sabio to enter the inn on his behalf in order to save his friend, that “bien entraría... aunque lo siento, pero temo que como me falta la experiencia, me he de cansar en balde y no le podré hallar, corriendo riesgo de ahogarnos todos” (222). Critilo and El Sabio then have to concoct the elaborate plan of swapping clothes in order to trick the guard into believing that Critilo himself is entering the inn. Having never entered the inn means that Critilo lacks the experience of how to overcome its challenges, and it is only through accumulating experience that one gains essential wisdom. In this way, Andrenio’s carefree spontaneity is shown to be an essential tool in the gathering of wisdom, contrasted with Critilo’s excessive heedfulness, which can impede the accumulation of experience necessary for prudent action.

The mutual dependence between Critilo and Andrenio is most acutely felt when the pair separate from each other. Throughout the course of the novel these splits become less frequent, with three in part one (1.VIII, 1.X, 1.XII), one in part two (2.IV–V, when Andrenio is led by Cécrope to La Plaça del Populacho while Critilo accompanies El Varón Alado to Sofisbella’s palace), and two in part three, one reluctant (3.V, when Andrenio is carried away against his will by a centaur) and one voluntary (3.VI, when Critilo and Andrenio split at the crossroads of the doves and the snakes). The first of these splits in part one happens in 1.VIII, when Critilo seeks out Artemia to ask for her help in saving Andrenio from Proteo/Falimundo’s court, which she readily provides. The second, and most potent, is in 1.XII, when Andrenio leaves Critilo to go to the palace of Falsirena, who claims to be his cousin. While Critilo temporarily joins Andrenio at Falsirena’s palace, the initial split of this episode is resumed when he returns one day to find Falsirena and Andrenio disappeared, and Falsirena’s palace boarded up and dilapidated. Critilo’s despair and panic during this separation is palpable: when a neighbour asks Critilo if Falsirena had stolen riches from him before fleeing, he replies, “sí, y mucho, joyas, perlas y diamantes, pero lo que más siento es haber perdido un amigo” (255), and in the process of searching the court for Andrenio, we read that Critilo “perdía el juicio” (256). Upon the encouragement of Egenio, Critilo returns to Falsirena’s palace to

witness a fiery cave appear, within which lifeless beings are strewn across the floor, benumbed and in thrall to a jewel-covered hand. Here, Critilo finds Andrenio, and the following scene constitutes perhaps the most emotionally-charged moment of the novel: “yacía en medio Andrenio, tan trocado, que el mismo Critilo su padre le desconocía. Arrojóse sobre él llorando y vozeándole, pero nada oía; apretábale la mano mas no le hallaba ni pulso ni brío” (261). As part one of *El Criticón* comes to a close, we therefore witness Critilo’s growing reliance on, and friendship with, Andrenio, evidence that he is assimilating the lesson of the essential complementarity between himself and his less rational counterpart, and of the need to temper his reason with the spontaneity and instinct represented by his friend (Andersen 2008: 210).

Throughout part one of *El Criticón* we learn that the protagonists incorporate both positive and negative characteristics: Andrenio’s natural ingenuity is countered by his tendency towards acting thoughtlessly, and Critilo’s self-reflexive reasoning is countered by his tendency towards acting with an excess of caution. Whilst the previous chapter, in relation to the *Agudeza*, outlined a positive conceptualisation of instinct and intuition, through their role in the spontaneous formation of the *concepto/agudeza*, the dynamic between Critilo and Andrenio presented in part one of *El Criticón* also demonstrates the way in which instinct must first pass through a stage during which it is carefully and artfully moulded through practice before it can reach its perfection, recalling the *Agudeza*’s paradoxical title as an ‘Arte de ingenio’. The fact that Critilo’s self-reflexive reasoning helps to temper Andrenio’s instinctual reactions renders, at this stage, the former’s temperament slightly superior to that of the latter, despite the deficiencies that it too incorporates.

Due to their status as dehumanised, universal symbols, Aranguren has condemned Gracián’s protagonists as empty shells who do not move the reader (297), an opinion with which Kassier agrees (12); while Robbins describes Critilo in particular as “rigid, misanthropic, and pessimistic” (209). As already discussed, the motivation of *El Criticón* is rarely to move the reader’s emotions or to evoke sympathy towards its characters. Gracián is an abstract and philosophical thinker, who uses narrative fiction and fictionalised characters to transmit a philosophical viewpoint. The necessary complementarity between Critilo and Andrenio demonstrated throughout part one of the novel represents, more generally, an attitude of moderation that Gracián believes that one should take in all aspects of life,

particularly towards the ends of virtue and prudence, as discussed in the next two sections.

*Part Two of “El Criticón”: Meeting with Virtelia*

While part one of *El Criticón* focuses on the inner formation of the individual, whose interior faculties are represented by the characters of Critilo and Andrenio, part two demonstrates Gracián’s ontological belief that man is a being-in-the-world, and that *ser* and *parecer* are interdependent, by turning his focus towards the individual’s necessary interaction with his surroundings. Each *crisi*, from 2.II onwards, deals with the following issues: friendship (2.II), greed (2.III), learning (2.IV), vulgarity (2.V), Fortune (2.VI), hypocrisy (2.VII), valour (2.VIII), vice (2.IX), virtue (2.X), honour (2.XI), position and power (2.XII), and insufficient understanding (2.XIII) (Kassier 38, and also summarised by Gracián in 2.II, 312). Kassier also points out that in part two Gracián alternates positive and negative *crisis*, with each odd-numbered *crisi*, from 2.III onwards, depicting a negative characteristic, and each even-numbered *crisi*, from 2.IV onwards, depicting a positive characteristic (45).

In part two of the novel we see Critilo and Andrenio pass through La Aduana de las Edades into La Varonil Edad. Their first stop in this new region of life is the house of Salastano, an anagram of Lastanosa, the name of Gracián’s friend and patron. As the protagonists prepare to leave Spain and enter France, Gracián’s negative *crisis* begin. Andrenio is soon seduced by the false knowledge of Cécrope and separates from his friend to follow him, while Critilo heads to Sofisbella’s palace. Reunited at the palace of Fortuna, the pair emerge at the base of Virtelia’s mountain. Before scaling this mountain, they are intercepted by El Falso Ermitaño who offers a shadow-version of Virtelia. However, they resist this and, bedecked in weapons from the Retrete de Valor, they begin the climb up Virtelia’s mountain. After the setback of El Palacio de la Hediondez, Critilo and Andrenio arrive at the Palace of Virtue, where Virtelia encourages them to continue on with their journey. As their journey proceeds, the pair are informed that Felisinda is in Rome. Part two ends with Critilo and Andrenio heading to the Alps and into the land of Vejecia.

The structure of part two of *El Criticón* roughly represents the practical realisation of the theoretical conclusions reached by Critilo during his imprisonment in Goa when he learnt to renounce his reliance on blind Fortune, to realise the value

of virtue, and to elevate the importance of moral philosophy. As such, early *crisis*, such as 2.II and 2.IV, focus on acquiring learning, *discreción*, and practical wisdom. We first see this when Critilo and Andrenio accompany Argos to Huesca and to Salastano's house, after a page requests that Argos donate one of his eyes to Salastano's collection of objects (2.II). Approaching the house, the pair take in Salastano's glorious gardens and the wildlife they contain (319–20), and upon entering they encounter Salastano's friends and their conversation (320–4), before inspecting his wide collection of curious objects, which prompts more enlightened discussion (325–30). Similarly, at El Museo del Discreto/El Palacio de Sofisbella in 2.IV, Critilo, guided by El Varón Alado and without Andrenio, discovers a host of musical instruments (362), learns about the merits and faults of different writers (363–6), meets Historia in the room of Memoria (367–71, as previously discussed), is guided by Ingenio to the room of Humanidad (372), dips briefly into the room of Natural Filosofía (373), and peruses at leisure the room of Moral Filosofía (373–8). We can therefore see that these early *crisis* of part two focus on different aspects of study and on acquiring wisdom, particularly practical wisdom. In contrast, 2.III and 2.V depict the consequences of bypassing this acquisition of practical wisdom, namely greed in La Cárcel de Oro (2.III) and vulgarity/ignorance at La Plaça del Populacho (2.V). Noteworthy here is that Andrenio does not accompany Critilo to Sofisbella's palace in 2.IV, having been led astray by Cécrope, indicating his inferior status in terms of the accumulation of wisdom.

As already discussed earlier in this chapter, when Critilo enters El Museo del Discreto/El Palacio de Sofisbella in 2.IV, Gracián demonstrates the superiority of prudence over history by outlining the former's utility in cultivating moral worth leading to salvation, thanks to its ability to function in three temporal planes (the past, the present, and the future), compared to history's focus on fame (which draws merely upon the past and the present, without projecting forward in time). As such, Gracián also presents the idea that prudence, through its ability to function in three temporal planes, actually incorporates and surpasses history. As also discussed, much of the debate surrounding Gracián's Pessimism/Optimism and religious orthodoxy/secularity, centres around the stress he places upon fame as the ultimate end of human life, or upon salvation as the end towards which man should dedicate his efforts during life. Before Critilo and Andrenio arrive at Salastano's house in 2.II, Gracián comments upon fame in such a way as to explain the way in which morality

incorporates it, establishing it as a result of and a reward for prudence and virtue, rather than as an end in itself.

As they approach Salastano's house, Argos describes to Critilo and Andrenio the portraits of great people that they will soon see inside. Critilo, unimpressed, states, "con vuestra licencia, la tengo por una diligencia inútil, porque yo más querría ver retratados sus relevantes espíritus que el material gesto" (2.II, 318). However, Argos points out that a flattering portrait of a person is usually indicative of a superlative spirit and that, through art (both portraits and books), this superlative spirit can transcend time and reach those living centuries later (318). Critilo then comments that,

Primor fue siempre de acertada política...eternizar los varones insignes en estatuas, en sellos y en medallas, ya para ideas a los venideros, ya para premio a los passados: véase que fueron hombres y que no son impossibles sus exemplos (318).

Critilo synthesises Argos' justification for immortalising eminent men in art, and bestowing fame upon them, in two ways: firstly, he points out that fame allows eminent men to serve as an example for those in the present ("ideas a los venideros") and, secondly, he explains that fame serves as a reward for those who lived eminently in the past ("premio a los passados"). Both of these points prove Gracián's conception of fame to be incorporated but surpassed by morality: the fame of others provides a model of how to act morally for those in the present, and fame also serves as a reward for virtue and moral action (moral action being the aim, and fame being a welcome but supplementary by-product of this).<sup>51</sup> Any references that Gracián makes to fame are therefore necessarily infused with a concern for morality, and with the connected concern for life after death in the form of salvation.

As such, the curiosities, such as portraits and other works of art, that Critilo and Andrenio are about to witness in Salastano's house should serve as a means towards the end of practical wisdom about humanity, which they can then use to inform their own actions, rather than as ends in themselves, as mere objects of curiosity which satisfy purposeless inquisitiveness. This idea is repeated at

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<sup>51</sup> The idea of fame as a reward for virtue is repeated in the apologue of 2.XI, the *crisi* in which Momo demonstrates the importance of honour and reputation by showing how easily they can be tainted: "La buena fama es esmalte de la virtud, premio, que no precio; hase de estimar la honra, pero no afectar...Es la honra sombra de la virtud, que la sigue y no se consigue, huye del que la busca y busca a quien la huya; es efecto del bien obrar, pero no afecto; decorosa, al fin, diadema de la hermosísima virtud" (486).

Sofisbella's palace, when Gracián quickly dismisses the pointless study of “la indagadora Natural Filosofía”, whose knowledge is seen as knowledge for its own sake, in favour of the true wisdom which can be bestowed by moral philosophy, whose knowledge serves a higher, more transcendent, purpose through its focus on moral conduct and virtue, which are necessary in order to earn salvation after death (2.IV, 373).

Part one of *El Criticón* demonstrated the way in which the pursuit of ‘pure’ knowledge for its own sake can represent man’s inability to accept his epistemological limitations, through Andrenio’s obsession with the sun/the divine upon discovering the world for the first time (1.II). In part two, we see a similar obsession with unattainable knowledge through Critilo’s fixation with meeting Sofisbella (Wisdom) in person (2.IV). Sofisbella is described throughout the *crisi* using language which connects her to the sun, and therefore to the divine. For example, her palace is described as “engolfado en luzes”, its walls, “diáfanos...y toda su materia transparente”, its doors and windows, “rasgados...patentes”, where “todo era luz y todo claridad” (361). Inside, Critilo is greeted by “un sol humano [a minister of Sofisbella] que parecía muger divina”, playing music more soothing than that of Orpheus (362). Similarly to Andrenio in part one, Critilo finds himself “olvidado aun de sí mismo” (361), and he implores El Varón Alado to introduce him to Sofisbella in person before leaving the palace, stating that “un tal cielo como éste no puede dexar de tener por dueño al mismo sol” (378–9).

After the intervening *crisi* recounting Andrenio’s adventures with Cécrope (2.V), a new guide, El Enano, then explains to Critilo why meeting Sofisbella is beyond his capabilities:

Créeme – decía el enano – que todo passa en imagen, y aun en imaginación, en esta vida: hasta essa casa del saber toda ella es apariencia. ¿Qué, pensabas tú ver y tocar con las manos la misma sabiduría? Muchos años ha que se huyó al cielo con las demás virtudes en aquella fuga general de Astrea. No han quedado en el mundo sino unos borrones de ella en estos escritos que aquí eternizan. Bien es verdad que solía estar metida en las profundas mentes de sus sabios, mas ya aun éstos acabaron; no hay otro saber sino el que se halla en los inmortales caracteres de los libros: ahí la has de buscar y aprender (2.VI, 401–2).

El Enano explains to Critilo that all earthly wisdom is “imagen”, “imaginación”, and “apariencia”, the shadow of ‘pure’ wisdom, but also that setting one’s sights on meeting Wisdom herself is futile: Wisdom is divine, living in the skies, and therefore cannot be accessed by man. Man’s only option is to catch glimpses of her in the

immortal writings she has left behind. Just as fame can be created through art and writing which transcends time, and functions as a lesson to others and as a reward for moral conduct, Wisdom too is glimpsed through writings which immortalise her insights. In this way, Gracián shows that fame and wisdom function similarly, and indeed serve towards the same end, with fame representing a means via which one can access a worldly form of wisdom (and not as an end in itself), reinforcing Gracián's conceptualisation of fame as a tool in the armour of learning, *discreción*, moral conduct and, ultimately, the attainment of life after death.

The early *crisis* of part one of the novel depicted the way in which Critilo, during his youth, abandoned himself to the wave of Fortune, enjoying his family's wealth and failing to take responsibility for his moral status by implementing his free will in order to make virtuous choices, until the tide of his Fortune changed and he ended up in prison. In 2.VI we see Critilo come face to face with Fortuna herself and assimilate the lesson, as per Christian orthodoxy, that Fortune/Providence must coexist with man's free will. Before arriving at Fortuna's palace, Critilo and his guide, El Enano, speak with a soldier, a student, and a courtier. All agree that Fortuna works "a ciegas," "s locas" (405), and acts "de bravo capricho" (407), rewarding those who least deserve it. This posits a view of Fortune as predetermined and inexorable, uninfluenced by the moral worth of man, and this is seemingly confirmed by the fact that Andrenio, freshly schooled in vulgarity and ignorance at La Plaza de Todo el Universo in the previous *crisis*, has managed to scale the heights of Fortuna's palace in advance and is reunited with Critilo when he gives him and his new friends a hand up (408).

However, this vision of Fortune as changeable, unfair, and blind is soon contradicted when she is presented in the text:

Llegaron ya a la última grada, donde estaba la Fortuna. Pero ¡oh cosa rara!, ¡oh prodigio nunca creído, y de que quedaron atónitos y aun pasmados!, digo, cuando vieron una reina totalmente diversa de lo que habían concebido y muy otra de lo que todo el mundo publicaba, porque no sólo no era ciega como se decía, pero tenía en una cara de cielo al medio día unos ojos más perspicaces que una águila, más penetrantes que un linze (408–9).

Critilo and Andrenio, alongside the soldier, the student, and the courtier, are surprised to find that Fortuna can not only see, but can see with astonishing clarity. When confronted with her reputation for bestowing good Fortune blindly upon those who least deserve it, Fortuna explains herself at length, stating,

Hoy quiero dar satisfacción al universo. Protesto, lo primero, que soy hija de buenos, pues de Dios y de su divina providencia, y tan obediente a sus órdenes, que no se mueve una hoja de un árbol ni una paja del suelo sin sabiduría y dirección. Hijos, es verdad que no los tengo, porque no se heredan ni las dichas ni las desdichas... Creedme que en los mismos hombres está el mal, ellos son los males y los peores, ellos ensalzan el vicio y desprecian la virtud, que no hay cosa hoy más aborrecida... Veis aquí mis manos: miradlas, reconocedlas, que no son mías; ésta es de un príncipe eclesiástico, y esta otra de un seglar; con éstas reparto los bienes, con éstas hago mercedes, con éstas dispenso las felicidades. Ved a quién dan estas manos, a quién medran, a quién levantan; que yo siempre doy las cosas por manos de los mismos hombres, ni tengo otras (409–10).

Here, Fortuna aligns herself with God and with “divina providencia”, meaning that Gracián’s conception of Fortune is characteristically Christian in its conflation of Fortune and Providence. This means that the twists and turns of Fortune represent the manifestation of God’s will, rather than the working of blind fate, and for this reason she sees with perfect clarity (Romera-Navarro 1938: 27). Fortuna points out that “no se heredan ni las dichas ni las desdichas”, and that “en los mismos hombres está el mal”, indicating that good or bad Fortune is not innate, predetermined, or a result of one’s birth, but is, rather, the result of one’s actions: unfortunately, virtue has come to be despised, meaning that, as a consequence, good Fortune is also rare. In this way, Fortune works on two planes: as an instrument of God’s will, and in response to man’s actions. This is indicated when she describes herself as having two different hands, one “de un príncipe eclesiástico”, and the other “seglar”.

Via this image of Fortuna possessing one other-worldly and one worldly hand, Gracián’s conceptualisation of Fortune in *El Criticón* therefore incorporates the paradox inherent in Christianity concerning the coexistence of free will and Fortune/Providence. Although these two remits are inherently paradoxical, there is a sense in which the religious and the secular, Fortune/Providence and free will, can be reconciled, if one is able and willing to accept a certain degree of contradiction. If so, it can be argued that it is God’s will that man act virtuously (i.e. that Providence is virtue and vice versa), and that God rewards man with good Fortune when he acts virtuously, meaning that Fortune/Providence, usually considered to be predetermined, can be moulded by the choices man makes using his free will. Egido argues similarly when she states that Gracián displaces,

La imagen tónica de la rueda de la fortuna a la del viento que sopla sobre la vela de un barco dominado por un timonel. La obra del jesuita se insertaba así en una amplia corriente moderna que trataba de controlar con la fuerza de la voluntad y de la prudencia, los avatares del destino (2014: 286).

Man's Fortune is not dictated by the whims of blind fate, nor is it predetermined by God. Rather, man controls his own Fortune and whether this is good or bad depends on how he chooses to use his free will.

Furthermore, whilst Fortuna is described in 1.I, during Critilo's shipwreck on the Isla Santa Elena, as "tántalo de la tierra, huyéndosele de entre las manos cuando más segura la creía" (1.I, 67), as though she were a static object that is almost within reach and that can be kept in perpetuity once attained, we here learn that good Fortune, as the reward for virtuous action, is never static, precisely because man himself, and his moral status, is never static and must always be refreshed and regenerated. Fortuna explains the importance of repetition in time to the soldier after he questions her on her changeability when she exclaims,

¡Hola, Tiempo!, ande la rueda, dé una vuelta y otra vuelta y nunca pare... ¿qué hizieran si ellos supieran que no había de haber mudanza?... ¡Hola, Tiempo!, ande la rueda, y desengañesse todo el mundo que nada permanece sino la virtud (414).

Fortuna's changeability means that man never falls into complacency regarding his moral status. Just as in 1.VI, when Quirón explained that one must always move forward in virtue and that going backwards is akin to condemning oneself to the status of a nobody, Fortuna here expresses the idea that man must continually prove his virtue by carrying out virtuous actions throughout his life. For this reason, while circumstances change, the only thing that should be constant in life is virtue itself: "nada permanece sino la virtud". Fortuna goes on to state that "los verdaderos, sabios, que son los prudentes y virtuosos, son muy superiores a las estrellas" (415), hinting that the ultimate form of good Fortune, and the ultimate reward for virtuous action, is something more other-worldly and transcendent (i.e. salvation after death), which in turn indicates the extent to which Gracián's conceptualisation of Fortune is infused with Christian doctrine.

Gracián continues to forge the connection between worldly good Fortune, virtuous action, and other-worldly reward in the following *crisi*, 2.VII. This *crisi* opens with an apologue in which man is told that all worldly goods, such as honour, friends, a home, and learning, are temporary and that he never truly possesses them. Incredulous, man asks what he does truly possess:

Respondiéronle que la virtud. Éssa es bien propio del hombre, nadie se la puede repetir. Todo es nada sin ella y ella lo es todo; los demás bienes son de burlas, ella sola es de veras. Es alma de la alma, vida de la vida, realce de todas las prendas, corona de las perfecciones y

perfección de todo el ser; centro es de la felicidad, trono de la honra, gozo de la vida, satisfacción de la conciencia, respiración del alma, banquete de las potencias, fuente del contento, manantial de la alegría (418–9).

Gracián therefore clearly establishes the belief that virtue is the only thing to which man should truly dedicate his attention during life, and he utilises the rest of the *crisi* to expose the hypocrisy of those who try to bypass this necessity.

After meeting with Fortuna, Critilo and Andrenio cross a drawbridge to the foot of Virtelia's mountain. This mountain, populated by wild beasts, represents the onerous and exhausting nature of the path of virtue. Before they can begin the climb, El Falso Ermitaño intercepts Critilo and Andrenio, warning them that “bien pocos son y bien raros los que llegan a lo alto” (421), and offering a shadow-version of Virtelia, “un retrato suya”, “sin tanto cansancio, sin costaros nada” (422). The pair are curious and follow El Falso Ermitaño to his cloister to meet Hipocrinda, the alternative to Virtelia.<sup>52</sup> Once granted entry by Pereza, the doorman, Critilo and Andrenio discover the hypocrisy of the cloister's monks, who claim to fast when they evidently do not do so, and who are obsessed with the idea of forging their *parecer* of virtuousness, abandoning completely their *ser* (428, 433). Towards the end of the *crisi*, Critilo, unconvinced by this empty charade of virtue, asks El Falso Ermitaño: “dime, por tu vida larga, si no buena: con esta virtud fingida, ¿podremos nosotros conseguir la felicidad verdadera?” (434). In asking this question, we see that Critilo has assimilated the lessons of the previous *crisi* that, firstly, virtue should be the only constant in man's life and, secondly, that this virtue will eventually be rewarded by the ultimate form of good Fortune, which is “la felicidad verdadera”. Given what Critilo and Andrenio have learned in the previous *crisi* about the necessity of continually renewing their virtue and of repeatedly proving and regenerating their moral status ceaselessly throughout life, we can assume that the ultimate “felicidad verdadera” to which Gracián here alludes is not granted in the earthly world: virtue is not static during life and is never attained in perpetuity in this world, meaning that its reward cannot be found in the earthly realm either. In other words, and as Rabone also argues, Gracián's notion of Happiness is other-worldly, conflated with salvation and life after death, a conception of Happiness which manifests Gracián's fundamentally Christian outlook (196, 208).

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<sup>52</sup> It is interesting to note here that Critilo accompanies Andrenio instead of separating from him, despite warning him against trusting El Falso Ermitaño.

With the value of true virtue firmly established, in the next three *crisis* of *El Criticón* Gracián reveals in more detail the characteristics of this virtue: firstly, virtue is urgent, requiring immediate action (2.VIII and 2.IX); secondly, it is linked to religion (2.IX and 2.X); and thirdly, its actualisation is associated with aesthetic experience (2.X). The first of these characteristics is demonstrated when Critilo and Andrenio turn away from the fake virtue offered by Hipocrinda, and head directly to *El Retrete del Valor* with *El Valeroso* in 2.VIII. Here they see the weapons which belonged to valiant warriors from history and hear the stories of their brave deeds. The armoury is described as the place where fame is earned (443) which, when connected to Gracián's conceptualisation of fame as an instrument of morality, shows that fame, morality, virtue, and valiant action are intertwined. For this reason, *El Valeroso* states,

Sin valor, nada vale, todo es sin fruto; poco importa que el consejo dicte, la providencia prevenga, si el valor no executa. Por esso la sabia naturaleza dispuso que el corazón y el lebro, en la formación del hombre, començassen a la par, para que fuesen juntos el pensar y el obrar (2.VIII, 454–5).

Here Gracián reiterates the idea that God and Providence decide only partially the direction of man's Fortune, and that even this is superfluous if it is not combined with man's courage. In opposition to a purely introspective and contemplative worldview, Gracián's ontological intertwining of interiority and exteriority demands that man engage with the world. As Romera-Navarro also argues, free will, choice, making decisions, engaging with the world, and carrying out difficult actions are central to Gracián's morality: "no se dirige a hombres contemplativos que viven alejados del ruido del mundo y pueden practicar cómodamente la virtud. Se dirige a criaturas de carne y hueso entregadas a la batalla de la existencia" (1938: 22).

Furthermore, man cannot wait for the right moment in order to start implementing his virtue through active decision-making; virtue is imperative and must be implemented as soon as one decides upon this path. This is demonstrated in the apologue of 2.IX, in which Gracián recounts the story of a man who prefers to remain on the side of a river populated by dangerous and ravenous beasts, instead of crossing the river to the other side, blooming with flowers and fruits, simply because he does not want to get wet, and prefers to wait for the flow of the water to stop before crossing over. This man knows that action must be taken, but is waiting for more convenient circumstances before taking it. Man often implements virtue in a

similar way, choosing to wait for his youthful passions to abate before rejecting vice and actively choosing virtuous action:

Assí que todos aguardan a que amaine el ímpetu de los vicios para passarse a la banda de la virtud. Mas es tan imposible el cessar los males, el acabarse los escándalos en el mundo mientras hay hombres, como el parar los ríos. Lo acertado es poner el pecho al agua y con denodado valor passar de la otra banda al puerto de una seguridad dichosa (2.IX, 457).

Once the decision has been taken to embark upon the path of virtue, this path must be taken straight away because “el ímpetu de los vicios”, “los males”, and all manner of difficult circumstances, will never completely cease, just as a river will never cease to flow. This is again demonstrated when Critilo and Andrenio begin the climb up Virtelia’s mountain and Andrenio, tired and scared, asks to postpone the ascent for another day, to which Lucindo responds that postponement is impossible (2.X, 470). Circumstances are rarely ideal, and life will always be filled with difficulty and with temptations towards vice. Virtue is earned by resisting this vice repeatedly, at every stage. Through the allegory of the apologue of 2.IX Gracián also implies that fleeing the dangerous beasts of one side of the river for the “seguridad dichosa” of the side filled with flowers represents a kind of spiritual rescue. As nothing is more pressing than man’s spiritual salvation, the valiant action that demonstrates and actualises virtue cannot be indefinitely postponed: virtue must be actualised urgently and immediately.

The connection between the path of virtue and spiritual salvation is also revealed in the second characteristic with which Gracián infuses his conception of virtue: its association with Christianity, revealed in 2.IX and 2.X. In 2.IX, just as Critilo and Andrenio commence the climb up Virtelia’s mountain, they come across El Palacio de la Hediondez which, whilst appearing celestial on the outside, emits a repugnant stench and is a shrine to bestial appetite on the inside. Here, Critilo and Andrenio must resist the calls to give in to Carne, Mundo, and Satanás, with the Devil imploring at the *crisi*’s close:

Venid, holguémonos, logremos la vida, gozemos de sus gustos, de los olores y unguientos preciosos, de los banquetes y comidas, de los lascivos deleites. Mirá que se nos passa la flor de la edad; passemos la edad en flor, comamos y bebamos, que mañana moriremos; andémonos de prado en prado, dando verdes a nuestros apetitos (467).

At this last staging post before scaling Virtelia’s mountain, Critilo and Andrenio are presented with the temptation to give in to vice, and to indulge their bestial appetites.

This virtue/vice dichotomy has clear roots in Christianity, exacerbated by the fact that the choice is presented to the protagonists by the Devil himself, implying that the alternative to El Palacio de la Hediondez, Virtelia's palace, pertains to the opposite of the Devil: to God.

This contrast is confirmed through the language used when Critilo and Andrenio reach the top of Virtelia's mountain in the following *crisi*: "llegaron ya a la superioridad de aquella dificultosa montaña, tan eminente, que les pareció estaban en los mismos azaguanes del cielo, convezinos de las estrellas" (2.X, 473). "Superioridad", "eminente", "azaguanes del cielo", and "estrellas" all imply that the peak of Virtelia's mountain represents a divine realm. Pelegrín also points out that the word 'cielo' reappears more than twenty times throughout this *crisi*, with the effect of emphasising Virtelia's connection to the divine (125). This is supported by the following description of Virtelia herself as "una divina reina" (478):

Tenía...todo su aspecto divinamente humano y humanamente divino. Era su gala conforme a su belleza, y ella era la gala de todo; vestía armiños, que es su color de candidez; enlaçaba en sus cabellos otros tantos rayos de la aurora con cinta de estrellas. Al fin, ella era todo un cielo de beldades, retrato al vivo de la hermosura de su celestial Padre, copiándole sus muchas perfecciones (479).

The fact that Virtelia is "divinamente humano" and "humanamente divino", and that she represents the "retrato al vivo" of the "celestial Padre", indicate that she represents a personification of God in the worldly realm: a version of God fitting for the earthly realm, via whom man can channel, and momentarily feel the presence of, the divine, a conception of virtue which resonates clearly with the process of the Eucharist, examined in the following chapter in relation to *El Comulgatorio*.

Virtelia's association with Christianity is again emphasised when she tells her visitors that there is no way to attain virtue other than via the Ten Commandments:

No hay otra escalera para allá sino la de los diez mandamientos. Por éssos habéis de subir, que yo no he hallado hasta hoy un camino para los ricos y otro para los pobres, uno para las señoras y otro para las criadas: una es la ley y un mismo Dios de todos (480).

The scenes leading up to Critilo and Andrenio's arrival at Virtelia's palace, as well as their encounter with her, are therefore infused with references to Christianity. As Pelegrín states: "toute la *crisi* évoque directement l'ascèse et la religion" (125). Whilst admitting that the allusions to religion are very strong in 2.IX and 2.X, Kassier persists in arguing that Gracián's conception of virtue is "untheological", "related to

worldly achievement”, and “a divine but not a Christian concept” (47–8). The extent to which Gracián’s notion of virtue is Christian is evidently open to interpretation. However, based upon the evidence provided from 2.IX and 2.X, it follows that such determinedly secular readings of these *crisis* are erroneous and somewhat disingenuous.

By describing Gracián’s version of virtue as divine but not Christian, Kassier makes a differentiation which hints towards the third characteristic of Gracián’s conception of virtue: its association with the aesthetic. Towards the end of 2.X, and towards the end of their meeting with her, Virtelia embraces Critilo and Andrenio and, “coronándolos con sus reales brazos, los transformó de hombres en ángeles, candidados de la eterna felicidad” (484). Accepted by Virtelia, the protagonists become candidates for eternal Happiness, a blessing which pleases many of her visitors so much that they request to build mansions beside her palace and to reside with her forevermore at the top of her mountain. However, Virtelia tells these people that “siempre se ha de passar adelante en la virtud, que el parar es volver atrás” (484). In other words, Gracián reiterates the idea that man’s virtue and his moral status is never static, or attained in perpetuity. Rather, man must continue to cultivate his virtue through repeated engagement with the world in the form of virtuous action. In this sense, Virtelia, and virtue, are not end points on man’s journey, and are instead “staging-post[s] on the long path to Happiness” (Rabone 196). Rather than aim to possess virtue, man must aim to demonstrate it repeatedly until he dies. This is why Virtelia does not invite Critilo and Andrenio to reside with her forever (and why their interaction with her represents the novel’s midpoint and not its end), and instead encourages them to continue on in the journey of their lives: it is only during the course of this journey that their virtue can be repeatedly manifested and that their moral status will be developed (Egido 2014: 290), after which their candidacy for “la eterna felicidad” can be rewarded.

Gambin, too, points out that virtue is not “una forma fija, un punto firme al cual podemos anclar” (64), stating that,

La virtud no se constituye a partir de una fisinomía ya alcanzada, completa en la rigidez de sus *prendas*, descrita una vez por todas. Ella se *encarna* en cada caso por medio de la totalidad de las innumerables relaciones que va estableciendo con las *prendas*. La virtud no es el resultado de una suma, sino la configuración momentánea y eventual de las relaciones *con* y *entre* las *prendas* (70–1).

Gambin's description of virtue as actualised, or incarnated (a word which again connects Gracián's conception of virtue to the Eucharist, in which bread and wine transubstantiate into the body and blood of Christ), "en cada caso" through "innumerables relaciones" which constitute a "configuración momentánea" is reminiscent of Gracián's definition of the *concepto*. As we saw in the previous chapter, the production of a *concepto/agudeza* leads to momentary insight into the universal/divine through the novel configuration of elements already known, in such a way as to make unexpected connections which provoke *admiración*/the feeling of aesthetic rapture. In this way, the *concepto* gives man a fleeting and transient insight into the interconnectedness of the world, as if from a God-like and universal point of view, and Gracián succeeds in blurring the boundary between epistemology and aesthetics (i.e. man achieves insight into the universal, 'knowledge' of a certain kind, through aesthetic experience). Furthermore, the novel connections forged between disparate elements must be continually reconfigured, via *ingenio*, in order for the sentiment of *admiración* to be refreshed and for awareness of the universal to be revitalised and re-actualised. We saw Critilo express the importance of renewing one's sense of novelty towards the world in 1.II, when he encouraged Andrenio to retain his innate sense of *admiratio* towards the universe, and exemplified doing so via contemplation of the stars and the creation of novel connections between them (1.II, 77 and 81, respectively). Gracián's conceptualisation of virtue in *El Criticón* works similarly, extending his conflation of epistemology and aesthetics, to include the remit of morality, and extending the function of *ingenio* to this remit as well.

Every time that man is confronted by a decision to make regarding how to respond to a particular circumstance, he must use it as an opportunity to demonstrate his virtue. In order to do so, he must undergo a process of deliberation, taking into account the particular circumstances in which he finds himself (the present), drawing upon his experiences in order to learn from similar circumstances which have already occurred (the past), and projecting forward towards potential desirable and undesirable outcomes of the circumstances (the future). This means that every time that man sets about acting virtuously, he implements prudence, in order to configure the past, the present, and the future into an actualisation of his virtue. Prudence, through drawing connections between three temporalities in order to arrive at an outcome that manifests virtue, therefore functions much like *ingenio*. Furthermore, just as the *admiración* which results from the production of the *concepto/agudeza*

produced by *ingenio* is transient and must be continually reproduced, as Virtelia points out, virtue is also transient and must be continually re-demonstrated. As seen in 2.X, Virtelia represents a method via which man can temporarily channel the divine, and the result is that the actualisation of virtue, via the implementation of prudence, mirrors the transient *admiración*/aesthetic rapture provoked via the *concepto/agudeza*. The actualisation of virtue and the production of the *concepto/agudeza* therefore lead to a temporary channelling of the divine and to aesthetic rapture respectively, which both enable man to access, momentarily, universality/divinity. In this way, when man actualises his virtue, he himself becomes a *concepto/agudeza*, the site upon which the connections forged by prudence/*ingenio* coalesce in simultaneous articulation and perception.

The sense of *admiración* that can be provoked by actualised virtue is demonstrated in 2.X, after Critilo and Andrenio have been embraced by Virtelia, and the *crisi* closes with an explosion of harmoniousness. Egido draws out this scene's divine/aesthetic overtones when she describes it as “una inusitada ascesis celeste [...] como si en vida fuese posible a veces visitar el territorio de la virtud, tocar el cielo” (2014: 291):

Resonaron en esto armoniosos clarines, folla acorde de instrumentos, alborozando los ánimos y realçando sus nobles espíritus. Despertóse un zéfiro fragante y bañóse todo aquel vistosísimo teatro de lucimiento. Sintióse tirar de las estrellas con fuertes y suaves influxos; fue reforçando el viento y levantándolos a lo alto, tirándoles para sí el cielo a ser coronados de estrellas (484).

The synaesthesia evoked in this scene reminds the reader of Gracián's comment in the *Agudeza* in which he discourages the reader from trying to theorise conclusively about *agudeza*, stating: “déjase percibir, no definir; y en tan remoto asunto, estímesese cualquiera descripción: lo que es para los ojos la hermosura, y para los oídos la consonancia, eso es para el entendimiento el concepto” (II, 21). With the Virtelia episode of 2.X, it could easily be added to this comment that what the *concepto* is for the understanding, what beauty is for the eyes, and what consonance is for the ears, virtuous action is for the soul. In this way, in *El Criticón*, Gracián intertwines the remits of aesthetics and morality, as he had already done with epistemology and aesthetics in the *Agudeza*, meaning that knowledge, art, and virtue become intertwined with each other: the only ‘knowledge’ we can access is aesthetic, temporary awareness (not understanding) of the universal; as the only knowledge we

can access is aesthetic, the wisdom granted by prudence is aesthetic too, meaning that acting virtuously is to act aesthetically. Virtuous action, art, and knowledge are one and the same thing, making the virtuous man an aesthetisation of himself (a *concepto/agudeza*) and making life art, and vice versa. This explains Andrenio's reaction in 1.V, during the crossroads episode in which he and Critilo wisely chose the middle path of prudence, when he states that "este camino más parece que nos lleva al cielo que al mundo" (1.V, 124): virtue, actualised by prudence/*ingenio*, will eventually be rewarded by eternal Happiness in the form of salvation after death, but each actualisation of virtue during life also temporarily channels the divine, in aesthetic fashion.

As part two of the novel comes to a close, in the final three *crisis*, the spiritual heights reached by Critilo and Andrenio at the palace of Virtelia are subject to an "inevitable descenso" (Egido 2014: 291), which stresses the transient nature of the insight into the universal that virtue grants. In 2.XI Gracián reiterates the idea that fame and good reputation are rewards for virtuous conduct, and that this virtuous conduct must be relentless and upheld in all aspects of man's life. We see this through the pedantic and fault-finding figure of Momo at La Puente de los Peros, who shows that nearly all men have their weak points, and that even minor weak points when it comes to virtue can lead to the decimation of one's honour (2.XI). We see another warning in 2.XII through the figure of El Assombrado, described as "un ni persona ni aun hombre, sino sombra de hombre, rara visión, y al cabo nada" (506). The reason for El Assombrado's status as a nobody is because, instead of taking care of his own reputation and moral status, he chooses to contribute to that of others, becoming a follower and worshipper of others' outstanding virtue rather than cultivating his own. This is demonstrated by a giant who is made up haphazardly from the limbs and body parts of other men "con que quedó muy persona, hombre de poder y valer" (510). As such, instead of forgetting oneself and of sacrificing one's moral status to that of others, man must actively take responsibility for his morality in order to become a *persona* himself, as Critilo learnt during his imprisonment in Goa. And finally, in 2.XIII, the danger of failing to take responsibility for one's self-development as a *persona* is manifest in La Jaula de Todos, where those who forget themselves for some excessive obsession or other are imprisoned in cages, and El Gigante warns Critilo and Andrenio that "el señorío verdadero, sabed que no consiste en mandar a otros, sino a sí mismo" (517). Having been schooled in the importance of cultivating

virtue, and in the consequences of not doing so, part two of *El Criticón* ends with Critilo and Andrenio heading towards the Alps and towards the region of old age.

Part two of the novel successfully develops Gracián's worldview in several key ways: we learn that fame is not an end in itself, but is rather a way for men in the present to learn from the good moral conduct of those in the past, as well as a reward for these past men for this conduct. We learn that Gracián's conceptualisation of Fortune is marked by the paradox inherent in Christianity between Fortune/Providence and free will, and that he attempts to overcome this paradox by embracing the contradictory idea that virtuous action, carried out using free will, is God's will/Providence and is rewarded by good Fortune, the ultimate form of which is salvation after death. We also learn that the actualisation of virtue via prudence/*ingenio*, for Gracián, represents the temporary channelling of the divine which, just like the *concepto/agudeza*, leads to *admiración*. This means that the aesthetic, the moral, and the epistemological are interconnected in Gracián's worldview, and that, by acting virtuously, man himself becomes a *concepto/agudeza*.

Also noteworthy from part two of the novel is the difference between Critilo and Andrenio: Andrenio is seduced by Cécrope (2.V), misses Sofisbella's palace (2.IV), is seduced by El Falso Ermitaño (2.VII), asks to postpone climbing Virtelia's mountain (2.X), and initially fails to see past the unimpressive exterior of her palace (2.X, 474), hinting at the lengths he still needs to travel in order to refine his instinct and to realise his status as a *persona*. Critilo, on the other hand, schooled in wisdom at the house of Lastanosa (2.II) and Sofisbella's palace/El Museo del Discreto (2.IV) knows not to separate from Andrenio during their interaction with El Falso Ermitaño (2.VII), and shows that he has assimilated the lessons of previous *crisis* when he realises that hypocrisy is not true virtue, and will not lead to "la felicidad verdadera"/salvation (2.VII, 434), again manifesting his intrinsic superiority over Andrenio.

Finally, the structure of part two of the novel, alternating between positive *crisis* (friendship, learning, Fortune, valour, virtue, position and power) and negative ones (greed, vulgarity, hypocrisy, vice, honour, insufficient understanding) reaffirms its didactic intent with regards to virtue: virtuous action, at every point, is a choice, which presents itself alongside immoral alternatives, and it should be the aim of man to choose virtue over vice at every opportunity. Robbins identifies Gracián's depiction of immoral choices as a high-risk strategy which has contributed to readings

of his work as pessimistic and profane (2019: 134). However, it can also be argued that in depicting immorality alongside morality in *El Criticón* Gracián successfully uses the imaginative, fictional form to illustrate more thoroughly his philosophical content, using it to demonstrate the idea that virtue is not static, is always at risk of the temptations of vice, and is never accomplished or fulfilled or grasped in perpetuity. Rather, virtue allows man to embody, temporarily, the divine, and this brief embodiment provides a glimpse into the “felicidad verdadera” which he can hope to incorporate, permanently, after death.

### *Part Three of “El Criticón”: Perfecting Prudence*

Unlike part one and part two, part three of *El Criticón* is composed of twelve *crisis* instead of thirteen. The early *crisis* of part three are focused on the idea of cultivating correct perception (3.I–V); the middle *crisis* depict Critilo and Andrenio reaching the pinnacle of prudence (3.VI–IX); whilst in the final *crisis* the protagonists attain *desengaño* and leave the worldly realm behind (3.X–XII). The majority of part three represents Critilo and Andrenio’s last day alive, as they are sent off by Vejecia in 3.II, “para passar a la última jornada de la tragicomedia de su vida, Critilo guiando y Andrenio siguiendo” (569). Therefore, when the pair go to sleep at the end of 3.IX and wake up in 3.X, they have passed over into an other-worldly realm: into life after death. This is indicated when, as the sun is setting on their last day alive, El Cortesano promises to lead Critilo and Andrenio the following day to see “todo el mundo de una vez, desde cierto puesto de donde se señorea”, and Andrenio asks in response, “¿qué dices, Cortesano mío?... ¿Para otro mundo y otro siglo nos emplaças?” (3.IX, 741), perceiving the shift into a universal, other-worldly realm.

Part three of the novel opens with Critilo and Andrenio at the foot of the Alps, poised to enter El Palacio de Vejecia. Here, the protagonists are admitted into their senectitude, the final stage of their lives. We see a final show of weakness from Andrenio at El Palacio de la Alegría, but part three’s focus on correct perception soon commences when Critilo and Andrenio are guided to El Reino de Verdad by El Acertador/El Adevino. Afterwards, they navigate La Plaça de Hazer Parecer las Cosas with El Descifrador, and then encounter the perfect perceptive abilities of El Veedor de Todo/El Zahorí. Critilo and Andrenio then come across a crossroads, with one path inhabited by doves, the other inhabited by snakes, and the pair decide to

split. However, as they realise their respective errors, their paths converge towards La Corte del Saber Prudente and they reunite. The pair next come across El Vano/El Fantástico and El Ocioso/El Poltrón and decide not to split, but rather to accompany each other to El Vano and El Ocioso's respective realms (El Palacio de la Vanidad and La Cueva de la Nada, respectively). After managing to save themselves from being pushed into La Cueva de la Nada, and from being led to the land of Soberbia again, Critilo and Andrenio are taken to the Spanish Ambassador's residence in Rome, where they witness a discussion on the nature of Happiness. Realising that they will never find Felisinda in the earthly realm, the protagonists, *desengañados* and *caídos en cuenta*, are led to the tallest of the seven hills of Rome to witness La Rueda del Tiempo. Finally, the pair are taken via boat to La Isla de la Inmortalidad, where the gatekeeper grants them entry to La Mansión de la Eternidad (3.XII). Part three ends with Gracián inviting the reader to follow the path of virtue in order to find out what happens in this mansion.

The shift towards the third period of study “consigo mismo”, that Gracián sets out in *realce XXV* of *El Discreto* (200), referring to the final, contemplative stage of man's life, is immediately evident in part three of *El Criticón*. Here, soldiers and warriors swap their weapons for walking sticks (3.I, 552), highlighting the shift from valiant action to quiet meditation that should take place between La Varonil Edad and La Vejez. As El Jano leads Critilo and Andrenio to see Vejecia, Critilo notes the lack of ignorant people in this stage of life, remarking that everyone “parece un oráculo” (3.I, 561); or as Vejecia's secretary puts it in the following *crisi*, all inhabitants of this realm are “maestros de prudencia y catedráticos de experiencia” (3.II, 564). Nevertheless, in 3.II, we again witness Andrenio's perduring fallibility at El Palacio de la Alegría, where he throws himself into a fountain of wine and falls into a stupor of drunkenness (paralleling the episode at La Fuente de los Engaños of 1.VII, and reminding the reader of the curse of error that Andrenio cast upon himself by drinking from this fountain). Critilo, on the other hand, recognises the vice that wine represents, stating the maxim “*quien es amigo del vino es enemigo de sí mismo*” (3.II, 581). However, as part three develops, Andrenio's powers of perception and his ability to temper his instinct also notably develop, showing that man's innate tendency to err can be corrected through experience and practice, and that even the most impulsive men can eventually become “un oráculo” in the realm of old age.

In 3.III Gracián continues the pattern in each part of his novel of depicting a representation of unattainable Truth. This was first seen in part one through Andrenio's initial obsession with the sun/the divine (1.II), and was repeated in part two through Critilo's desire to meet Sofisbella/Wisdom in person (2.IV–V), both episodes representing man's tendency to try to surpass his epistemological limitations by aiming towards knowledge of the divine, and towards the type of understanding which is beyond his capabilities as a human being. This is represented in part three when Critilo and Andrenio meet El Acertador/El Adevino, who has the extraordinary ability of reading characters and of predicting their actions, and who leads them to El Reino de Verdad, the kingdom of Truth herself. As they approach the court of Verdad, they notice that people are fleeing in horror. El Acertador explains that Verdad is on the verge of giving birth and that people are fleeing her offspring, afraid of the truths she might release into the world. Verdad's court is described in a similar manner to Sofisbella's palace in part two, using language and imagery which associates it with the divine: "una ciudad por todas partes abierta", its streets, "essentas, anchas y muy derechas, sin vueltas, revueltas ni encrucijadas"; the houses of the court "eran de cristal, con puertas abiertas y ventanas patentes", and even the sky "estaba muy claro y muy sereno" (3.III, 607), to the extent that Critilo remarks upon the kingdom's other-worldliness, stating, "este, cielo es, que no mundo" (609). The court of Verdad is shown to be lacking in worldly obscurity and artifice, and is effectively depicted as a divine realm, characterised by direct perception and complete clarity.

However, as the protagonists approach the Plaza Mayor of the court, where Verdad resides, Andrenio becomes overwhelmed and faints (609), and Critilo, too, is overcome by fear: "hasta el mismo Critilo, ¿quién tal creyera?, llevado del vulgar escándalo, cuando no exemplo, se metió en fuga, por más que el Acertador le procuró detener con razones y con ruegos" (610). Despite El Acertador's cries of, "¡mira que huyes de un cielo!" (3.III, 610), Critilo flees precisely for this reason, terrified of glimpsing Truth directly, and afraid of the revelations that Verdad and her offspring will bring. The implication here is that unfiltered Truth is not fitting for this world, and when confronted by just the prospect of it, man becomes shaken, overwhelmed, and scared. In other words, Truth is beyond man's cognitive abilities and even the usually calm and lucid Critilo concedes this.

Unadorned Truth cannot be processed by man's intellect, meaning that its adornment and surface appearance, its *parecer*, becomes a necessary and essential filter between it and the world: Truth disguises its *ser* in order to make itself palatable to men's perceptive abilities (see, also, *Agudeza, discurso LV*, 563, as previously discussed). As examined in chapter three, in *El Político, El Discreto*, and the *Oráculo*, Gracián presents the possibility that man can learn to read the *parecer* of the world in order to discern the reality of the people and situations which present themselves to him. *El Criticón* continues this pattern and, for this reason, El Descifrador, whose speciality lies in decoding the surface appearance of the world, its *parecer*, in order to read the Truth which lies below the surface, its *ser*, becomes Critilo and Andrenio's guide in 3.IV. El Descifrador states, "la dificultad lo hallo yo en leer y entender lo que está de las tejas abaxo, porque como todo ande en cifra y los humanos coraçones estén tan sellados y inescrutables, asegúroos que el mejor letor se pierde" (3.IV, 611). El Descifrador points out the necessity of learning to read the world due to the fact that the truth of man's motivations is more often than not concealed. In order to react appropriately to people and to situations, man needs to act like a reader interpreting a book, utilising his interpretative abilities to read below the surface and between the lines of a situation. The metaphor of the world as a book to be analysed is stressed by El Descifrador through the way in which he describes people of the world as linguistic markers to be read. For example, he describes certain men as "diphthongos en el mundo" (615), and others as "añadiduras de letras, puntillos de íes y tildes de enes" (620).

Nevertheless, El Descifrador's perceptive abilities are not easily gained and require dedicated attention and practice. We witness the difficulty of implementing the perceptive powers of El Descifrador at La Plaza de las Apariencias: while El Charlatán aims to displace Truth with opinion by confusing a crowd into collectively declaring something as true which obviously is not (e.g. that a donkey is an eagle), El Descifrador immediately sees beyond this and is on the verge of revealing his deceit. However, El Charlatán, not ready for the *desengaño* that El Descifrador will bring, purposefully plunges the square into a chaos of diverging perspectives, by vomiting up the ink of various historians, with the result that Truth is obscured in a sea of conflicting points of view. Learning to read the world is therefore a difficult task, requiring man to wade through the sea of opinion and to think critically in order to arrive at the *ser* of a situation. As outlined in chapter three, this depiction of the world

as hostile and deceitful was also depicted in the *Oráculo*. However, like in this earlier text, in *El Criti6n*, Graci6n presents alongside the confusion of the world man's intrinsic ability to confront and to overcome interpretative challenges, if he is willing to dedicate himself to the refinement of his perceptive abilities.

In the apologue of the following *crisi*, 3.V, El Veedor de Todo/El Zahor6 explains that *desenga6o* does not occur at the beginning of life because it is despised by people who prefer not to see the harsh reality of situations. As such, *desenga6o*, who used to warn men at the beginning of their lives that "no naciste para el mundo, sino para el cielo; los halagos de los vicios matan y los rigores de las virtudes dan vida" (635), was ostracised and banished from the entrance of life. However, man's preference for *enga6o* is so strong that even when *desenga6o* arrives, as man approaches death, it is not recognised. As such, the world is not inherently deceitful. Rather, the deceitfulness of the world is a result of man's inability to see beyond the worldly, to accept his other-worldliness, and to embrace virtue through the abandonment of vice. This means that man himself, and not God, created the "desconcierto del mundo" and is responsible for the confusion therein (635). Unlike man, El Veedor de Todo can see into the interiority of people's hearts and the blood flowing in their veins, enabling him to see the world in a constant state of *desenga6o*.

El Veedor de Todo's ability to enter inside the seemingly impenetrable is demonstrated when Andrenio is carried away by a centaur, against his will, into El Palacio de Caco and Critilo, seeking to follow Andrenio in order to rescue him, is unable to find the building's entrance or exit, or any gap through which he can enter. El Veedor de Todo is able to lead Critilo inside where they discover all the palace's inhabitants, including Andrenio, to be invisible. Paralleling, but inverting, the episode in which Andrenio is held as prisoner in Falsirena's palace in 1.XII (in which Egenio recognises the need to extinguish the light reflecting off a disembodied, jewel-covered hand in order to free Andrenio from the thrall of greed), here El Veedor de Todo explains that only the light beam of *desenga6o* will free the inhabitants of El Palacio de Caco from the jewel-covered hand which maintains them in a state of undeserved luxury: "as6i que, en amaneciendo la luz del desenga6o, anocheeci6 todo artificio" (3.VI, 655). Renouncing the convenience and comfort of vice, aided by *desenga6o*, is shown to be the route via which man can set himself on the path towards "los rigores de las virtudes" and "el cielo" (3.V, 635).

While El Acertador/El Adevino, El Descifrador, and El Veedor de Todo/El Zahorí all present strong powers of perception towards which man should aim, man's reality is that it is very difficult for him to attain the perfect, almost divine-like perceptive abilities of these figures. However, the skill which man does have above any other living creature is "aquella del rumiar" (3.VI, 654). El Veedor de Todo therefore tells Critilo to

Piense, medite, cave, ahonde y pondere, vuelva una y otra vez a repassar y repensar las cosas, consulte lo que ha de dezir y mucho más lo que ha de obrar. Assí que su rumiar ha de ser el repensar, viviendo del reconsejo muy a lo racional y discursivo (655).

"Viviendo...a lo racional" indicates that man has the unique advantage of reason, whether one conceptualises this as objective rationality or as imaginative *ingenio*; whilst "viviendo...a lo...discursivo" indicates that man also has the benefit of being able to think linearly. "Repassar", "repensar", and "reconsejo" all stress that man has the unique ability to revise events and to learn from this revision, "sacando de los senos de la memoria las cosas y passándolas al entendimiento" (655).

As such, man's primary intellectual capability lies in his ability to take into account time and to learn with the passing of time, from experience, encapsulated in the idea of prudence. As outlined in the previous chapter, *ingenio* can be implemented through a rationalised and deliberated process with clearly delineated steps, or it can take place spontaneously, intuitively, and instinctively, with no conscious, intellectual input from man. Prudence, as a form of *ingenio*, can also be carried out in these two ways, learnt and refined through experience and practice, and reaching its perfection when carried out unconsciously. Within part three of *El Criticón*, Gracián novelises the process by which Critilo, and particularly Andrenio, perfect their ability to implement prudence/*ingenio*, from doing so consciously and rationally, to doing so unconsciously and intuitively, representing the apex of the trajectory that man must undertake in the quest of learning to read the world correctly.

Gracián shows this development in three stages: the first in 3.VI, when the pair react to another crossroads in their path; the second in 3.VII, when the pair are confronted by the guides, El Vano and El Ocioso; and the third in 3.IX, at La Cueva de la Nada. The first of these stages is manifest when Critilo and Andrenio, en route to La Corte del Saber Prudente, come to a crossroads in 3.VI, recalling and reminding the reader of the crossroads that the pair came across at the outset of their journey in 1.V. This early crossroads introduced the idea of *medianía*, represented in the middle

path dominated by prudence, occupying a place between the two negative extremes of excessive instinct and excessive reason. However, unlike this early episode, the crossroads of part three presents Critilo and Andrenio with not three onwards paths, but with only two. We read,

A pocos passos dieron en raro bivio, dudosa encrucijada, donde se partía el camino en otros dos, con ocasionado riesgo de perderse muy al uso del mundo. Començaron luego a dificultar cuál de las dos sendas tomarían, que parecían estremos. Estaban altercando al principio con encuentro de pareceres, y después de afectos, cuando descubrieron una banda de cándidas palomas por el aire y otra de serpientes por tierra (3.VI, 656).

Whilst in the earlier episode Critilo, accustomed to the tradition of the ‘bivium’ (two onwards paths) over that of the ‘trivium’ (three onwards paths), was taken aback by the trifurcation of the road ahead, the presence of the third, reconciliatory path, crowned by the pillar of prudence, made it obvious which path was the correct one to take (1.V, 120). In part three, however, with only two onwards paths, the correct choice is not so obvious and Critilo and Andrenio are forced to make a decision.

Both protagonists interpret the crossroads to be a choice between one wholly positive and one wholly negative path, without considering the possibility of reconciling the two extremes into a temperate middle way (Rabone 200–1). As such, Andrenio, believing that the simplicity and sincerity of the doves is what man should aim for, chooses the left path, occupied by them. Critilo, on the other hand, believing that the astuteness and artfulness of the snakes is what man should aim for, chooses their path instead. Both agree that “el primero que descubriese la corte del Saber triunfante avisasse al otro y le comunicasse el bien hallado” (657). As they travel along their respective paths, Critilo and Andrenio realise that the choice presented to them between the doves and the snakes, and between simplicity and astuteness, was a choice of extremes: Andrenio realises that the doves do not embody simplicity so much as naivety and meekness, and Critilo discovers that the snakes do not so much represent astuteness as ruthless and cunning Machiavellianism.

However, pivotal in this episode is that Critilo and Andrenio do not stubbornly assert the superiority of their chosen extreme and instead reflect upon and reassess their choice:

Y fue cosa notable que ambos a la par, aunque tan distantes, parece que se ojearon, pues convinieron en dexar cada uno el estremo por donde había echado, el uno de la astucia, el otro de la sencillez, y poniendo la mira en el medio, descubrieron la corte del Saber prudente y se encaminaron allá. Llegaron a encontrarse a un puesto donde se volvía a unir ambas sendas y a emparejarse los estremos (3.VI, 665).

As emphasised by the crossroads episode of 1.V, the protagonists again realise, through “poniendo la mira en el medio”, that the choice presented to them was between two negative extremes, whose paths must be reconciled in order to arrive at a temperate middle way. As they gradually realise that they have both chosen an extreme path, Critilo and Andrenio’s routes then merge and the one onwards path that they tread together eventually leads them, accompanied by El Sesudo, to La Corte del Saber Prudente.

Rabone points out that the idea of combining the positive and negative characteristics of doves and snakes originates in the Gospel of Matthew (10:16) (198), meaning that the reconciliation that Gracián here advocates harks back to Biblical truths which man should already know, but whose wisdom has been forgotten or set aside. Critilo and Andrenio, having experienced the crossroads of 1.V and having been schooled in the importance of *medianía* there, should have known that the crossroads presented to them in 3.VI was one of undesirable extremes and that it really represented what Rabone terms an “implicit trivium” (201): while the crossroads only appeared to offer two onwards paths, the reality was that there was always a third choice, which united the excessive extremes of the two on offer. Nevertheless, what Critilo and Andrenio do differently in 3.VI is realise the possibility of a third, reconciliatory path themselves, without the need for a guide or for an ornately decorated column pointing them in the right direction (Rabone 201). Through this episode, we therefore witness Critilo and Andrenio gaining the experience necessary in order for them to reach the conclusion of *medianía* themselves, and this accumulation of experience represents the first stage in the development of their skills in the remit of prudence.

After having travelled to La Corte del Saber Prudente, having visited the offices of Juicio and Entendimiento there, and having bathed in the bath of prudence (3.VI–VII), Critilo and Andrenio say goodbye to El Sesudo and head to Rome in 3.VII. In the apologue of this *crisi*, Gracián makes clear that the wisdom of *medianía* that Critilo and Andrenio have just acquired cannot be taken for granted. The narrator states,

¿Quién creyera que Andrenio, y mucho menos Critilo, recién caldeados en las oficinas de la cordura, frescamente salidos de darse un baño moral de prudencia y atención, habían de errar jamás las sendas de la virtud, las veredas de la entereza? Pero assí como dentro de la más fina grana se engendra la polilla que la come y en las entrañas del cedro el gusano que le carcome,

así de la misma sabiduría nace la hinchazón que la desluce, y en lo más profundo de la prudencia la presunción que la desdora (3.VII, 679–80).

Prudence, much like virtue, is never complete, and must be continually re-actualised throughout man's life. As such, just as our ability to carry out virtuous action necessarily entails the possibility of vice, our ability to carry out prudent action necessarily entails the possibility of carrying out imprudent action: it is in choice and in decision making (i.e. the use of free will) that virtue and prudence manifest themselves. Whilst this can be interpreted negatively, in the *miseria hominis* tradition, to argue that man is perpetually condemned to grapple with vice and with temptation, it can also be interpreted positively, in the *dignitas hominis* tradition, to argue that man's free will to choose between virtue and vice bestows upon him the possibility of earning salvation (Egido 2001: 150–62; Rabone 170).

Kahn, in reference to Christian humanism generally, therefore links prudence to the essential paradox of Christianity which posits the coexistence of free will and Fortune/Providence. She states,

Prudence itself is contingent upon the essential paradox of Christian humanism: the coexistence of divine foreknowledge and free will. The belief that we do indeed have free will justifies a rhetoric of contradiction as that which allows us to respond appropriately to any given situation (66).

Contradiction (i.e. the presence of conflicting options from which to choose, such as the option presented to Critilo and Andrenio in 3.VI between the paths populated by doves and snakes) provides evidence that God has invested man with free will and that he is graciously providing him with the opportunities within which to exercise it. A world without contradiction, “un mundo bueno, el mejor de todos, equivoca con la gloria; un mundo malo, el peor de todos, con el infierno” (Maldonado de Guevara 14). In other words, a perfect world, without contradiction, would be conflated with heaven, whilst the worst of all possible worlds would be conflated with hell. Free will, and the necessity of implementing it, manifests God's glory and generosity, in granting man the possibility to earn salvation in heaven, instead of immediately banishing him from heaven and condemning him to hell. As such, a prerequisite of free will is that good and bad, morality and immorality, and virtue and vice, must coexist in the earthly realm. Choice, variety, and paradox are therefore central to the

human experience of navigating the world and, without them, virtue, prudence, and salvation would be impossible.<sup>53</sup>

For this reason, becoming aware of the necessity of reconciling extremes into a temperate middle way in 3.VI does not mean that Critilo and Andrenio's apprenticeship in prudence is complete. In 3.VII the second stage of their development in the remit of prudence takes place, when they are confronted, again, with a similar choice between two negative extremes: en route to Rome, the pair come across two warriors, El Vano/El Fantástico and El Ocioso/El Poltrón, the former representing pride and arrogance, and claiming to lead his followers to immortality, the latter representing idleness and laziness, and claiming to lead his followers to eternal rest. As ever, Critilo and Andrenio demonstrate contrasting reactions to the two potential guides: Critilo is attracted by the idea of immortality, knowing it to be intertwined with virtue and salvation (3.VII, 683); whereas Andrenio, perpetually inferior, is attracted to the idea of resting in old age, after having undergone the hardships of life (3.VII, 683). However, having learned from experience, the protagonists decide not to separate, as they would usually do:

Todo el precioso día gastaron en su necia altercación, asistiéndoles a cada uno su padrino, a Critilo el Vano y a Andrenio el Poltrón, sin poderse ajustar; antes, estuvieron al canto de dividirse echando por su opinión cada uno. Mas Andrenio, porque no se dizesse que siempre tomaba la contraria y quería salir con la suya, se dobló esta vez, diciendo que se rendía más al gusto de Critilo que al acierto (3.VII, 683).

Despite disagreeing, as they also did when confronted by the snakes/doves crossroads in 3.VI, in this instance Andrenio decides not to separate from Critilo. Instead of having to undergo an experience first in order to learn from it, Andrenio is here utilising and reflecting upon his past experiences in order to access wisdom which he already possesses and to make the choice which will lead to the best outcome: with the failure of his split from Critilo in the previous *crisi* and their success in reaching La Corte del Saber Prudente together in mind (3.VI), Andrenio draws upon the wisdom granted through this past experience before choosing not to split from Critilo. This means that he implements prudence in order to arrive at the decision of sticking with Critilo, reminiscent of Critilo's earlier decision to stick with Andrenio during the episode with El Falso Ermitaño at the hermitage of Hipocrinda (2.VII), against his better judgement. This represents the second instance in part three of Critilo and

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<sup>53</sup> An idea repeated by Gracián in the apologue of 3.VIII, 701–2.

Andrenio independently making the decision to remain together, without the prompting or support of a guide.

Critilo and Andrenio therefore accompany El Vano and El Ocioso to their respective realms as a foursome. In both of these realms, Andrenio again demonstrates the development of his skills within the remit of prudence. Firstly, as he is led by El Vano towards the smoking chimneys of El Palacio de la Vanidad, where Soberbia resides, he shows that his ability to read surface appearances is improving when he states,

Para ser ésta una casa, con tan magestuosa y un tanto monta de todas las ilustres casas, con tantas y tan soberbias torres que dexan muy abaxo a las de la imperial Zaragoza y ocupan essas regiones del aire, parece que tiene poco fundamento, y ésse flaco y falso (3.VII, 687).

Andrenio's ability to read from the surface appearance of Soberbia's palace the hollowness of its interior contrasts with his earlier disappointment at the lacklustre appearance of Virtelia's palace, when he decried, "¡qué triste apariencia tiene! ¿Qué será allá dentro?" (2.X, 474), sceptical that such a plain palace could house a resident of any worth. In contrast, in 3.VII, Andrenio's initial instinct proves correct when inside El Palacio de la Vanidad he comes across rooms quite literally full of hot air, the hurricane of vanity, and across people inflated with self-importance, obsessed with family trees, crests, family connections, and the history of their surnames.

Andrenio's ability to learn from experience is again evidenced when El Ocioso leads the protagonists through the Meadow of Idleness to La Cueva de la Nada in 3.VIII, where they witness people who, determined to live life in complete comfort and with no stress, fail to distinguish or to exert themselves within any field and, as a consequence, fall into nothingness and oblivion. Forcione has argued that Gracián's depiction of nothingness at La Cueva de la Nada gives "una dignidad transcendental a la negación", and that Gracián supports the idea that "el verdadero cristiano debe reconocerse como Nadie para alcanzar la salvación" (1985: 667 and 668, respectively. Repeated by Egginton 161). This type of pessimistic interpretation regards death as an abyss within which individuality, and therefore individual moral status, dissipates, ceases to carry significance, and cannot be rewarded after death: life is simply to be tolerated and survived until death plunges man back into the nothingness from whence he came. However, such a reading clearly contradicts Gracián's ideology of forging one's status as a *persona* throughout life, with the aim of this status providing evidence of one's virtue which can then be rewarded with

salvation after death. Gracián's rejection of nothingness as a desired end to life is highlighted when Critilo points out the problem with the kind of lifestyle that it entails when he observes, "páreceme...que toda esta ciencia del saber vivir y gozar para en pensar en nada y hazer nada y valer nada. Y como yo trato de ser algo y valer mucho, no se me asienta esta poltronería" (711). Gracián therefore turns away from nothingness and does not consider it an end towards which man should aspire or to which he should resign himself (most obviously evidenced by the fact that the novel does not end with this *crisi*).

Despite the fact that the nothingness offered by El Ocioso represents the simpler option, and despite his instinct drawing him towards it, Andrenio overcomes this instinct, remembers that experience has taught him to stick with his wiser counterpart, and again follows Critilo onwards, in spite of the "harto dolor de su corazón" (711). By sticking together when confronted by El Vano and El Ocioso, by learning to read surface appearances at Soberbia's palace, and by correcting instinct at La Cueva de la Nada, we therefore see that the second stage of Gracián's depiction of the development of Critilo and Andrenio's skills within the remit of prudence, and particularly those of Andrenio, involves using past experience in order to inform decisions taken in the present, particularly towards the aim of correcting one's natural, but ill-advised, impulses, because these impulses have proven to be erroneous in the past. This second stage also manifests Gracián's belief that man has the capability of perfecting himself despite his instinctual pulls towards more base behaviour (Correa Calderón 1971: xlvi): his belief that man's *dignitas* can ultimately overcome his *miseria*.

The third and final stage of the development of Critilo and Andrenio's prudence, in which it reaches its perfection by being implemented unconsciously and intuitively, occurs in 3.IX: having already realised that the path of idleness and rest, terminating in La Cueva de la Nada, will not help them earn their status as *personas*, Critilo and Andrenio, patiently listening to El Vano's invective against El Ocioso's offering, hoping to persuade them into returning to El Palacio de la Vanidad with him, are unexpectedly seized by their would-be guides. First, El Ocioso tries to push Andrenio into La Cueva de la Nada and El Vano, seeing this, in turn clasps Critilo, intending to drag him to El Palacio de la Vanidad once again:

Mucho más dixera, que tenía mucho que dezir de la nada, a no interrumpirle el Ocioso, que acercándose a Andrenio, intentó a empellones de dexamiento arrojarle dentro de la infeliz

cueva y sepultarle en medio del fondón de la nada. Viendo esto el Fantástico [El Vano], asió de Critilo y començó a tirar de él hazia el palacio de la vanidad, llenándole de cascos de viento. Fatales ambos escollos de la vejez, tan por extremo opuestos que en el uno suele peligrar de ociosa y en el otro de vana. Pero fue único remedio darse ambos las manos, con que pudieron templarse y hazer un buen medio entre tan peligrosos extremos. Asieron de la ocasión que, aunque cana, no calva, y a pura fuerça de razón y de cordura salieron del evidente riesgo de su pérdida (3.IX, 727).

Critilo and Andrenio, perceiving the risk of a forced separation, instinctively join hands and, in doing so, evade the “tan peligrosos extremos” of El Ocioso and El Vano by physically creating “un bien medio” between themselves. This moment represents the crux of the novel as Critilo and Andrenio finally assimilate and put into practice the lesson presented to them at the crossroads of 1.V, that the “único remedio” in life lies in the reconciliation of excessive instinct and excessive reason, via the path of prudence, and in the balance between their two characters and dispositions.

Unlike in 3.VI, in which Critilo and Andrenio choose to separate at the paths of the doves and of the snakes, and must undergo this experience before realising their error and finding the path of prudence; and unlike 3.VII, in which Andrenio consciously reflects upon this past experience in order to inform his decision to stick with Critilo, despite doing so reluctantly and wanting to follow the path offered by El Ocioso; in 3.IX, Critilo and Andrenio’s joining of hands represents a more intuitive act: they join together instinctively, with very little reflection and with no conscious cognitive process. Having now assimilated their bank of past experiences, including their splits at La Corte de Falimundo (1.VII), at La Venta de Volusia (1.X), at El Palacio de Falsirena (1.XII), at La Plaça del Populacho (2.V), and at El Palacio de Caco (3.V), and including the times when they stuck together at El Hiermo de Hipocrinda (2.VII), on the path towards La Corte del Saber Prudente (3.VI), and when initially confronted by El Vano and El Ocioso (3.VII), Critilo and Andrenio have finally absorbed the lessons of their lifetime and have arrived at a point at which they can implement prudence without a reflective, and linear, process of cognition. Rather, their reaction to the situation in which they find themselves spontaneously comes into existence with the situation itself.

The timeliness of this act is highlighted by Gracián’s reference to Ocasión when he writes that Critilo and Andrenio “asieron de la ocasión que, aunque cana, no calva”. In the emblem tradition, Ocasión is often depicted as bald at the back, representing the fact that man must take advantage of the moment in which she presents herself in order to grasp on to her hair before she passes and there is no

longer any possibility of doing so.<sup>54</sup> By grasping *Ocasión* at the right moment, and just in time (indicated by the fact that she is “cana”), Gracián uses this emblem to emphasise the timeliness, and subsequently the refinement of Critilo and Andrenio’s instinct and intuition. Furthermore this refinement is shown to be a result of “pura fuerza de razón y de cordura”, showing that it is the result of a deliberated process, presenting the idea, first posited in the *Agudeza*, that rationality and artifice can lead to the perfection of instinct and intuition.

Critilo and Andrenio’s perception of danger and their simultaneous action to save themselves from this danger reflects the simultaneous existence of an idea (the *concepto*) and its manifestation in the world (the *agudeza*), taking us back, once again, to Gracián’s definition of the *concepto* in the *Agudeza*. As examined in the previous chapter, the *concepto*, “un acto del entendimiento”, which perceives “la correspondencia que se halla entre los objetos”, is intrinsically intertwined with its manifestation in the world, its “sutileza objetiva” (i.e. perception and articulation of the *concepto/agudeza* are simultaneous). In 3.IX of *El Criticón* Gracián transposes this theory to the realm of morality: in the same way that the *concepto/agudeza* temporarily elevates man’s understanding to universal heights, through the simultaneous perception and articulation of unexpected connections in the world, the implementation of prudence temporarily allows man to channel the divine, through the activation of virtue, which he does through connecting past, present, and future into a nexus from which the virtuous course of action can be perceived and actualised. Whilst prudence can result from rational deliberation, the most perfect and accomplished form of it is when the perception of virtuous action and its actualisation are simultaneous, a result of instinct, which manifests no delay between perception and actualisation, and not of rationality, which requires a linear process of cognition.

The intertwining of moral action and channelling of the divine/aesthetic experience in 3.IX is evident when, after Critilo and Andrenio save themselves from the threat of *El Ocioso* and *El Vano* by instinctively joining hands, Gracián brings into consideration the faculty of *ingenio*, stating,

Trataron, ya vitoriosos, de encaminarse a triunfar a la siempre augusta Roma, teatro heroico de inmortales hazañas, corona del mundo, reina de las ciudades, esfera de los grandes ingenios, que en todos siglos, aun los mayores, las águilas caudales tuvieron necesidad de volar a ella y darse unos filos de Roma... Trono del lucimiento, que lo que en ella luce por todo el mundo campea, fénix de las edades, que cuando otras ciudades perecen ella renace y

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, emblem CXXII, ‘In Occasionem’, of Alciati’s *Emblematum liber*.

se eterna, emporio de todo lo bueno, corte de todo el mundo, que todo él cabe en ella; pues el que ve a Madrid ve sólo a Madrid, el que ve a París no ve sino a París y el que ve a Lisboa ve a Lisboa, pero el que ve a Roma las ve todas juntas y goza de todo el mundo de una vez, término de la tierra y entrada ca[t]ólica del cielo (3.IX, 727–8).

Critilo and Andrenio, having implemented prudence in its most perfect form, are described as “ya vitoriosos” and, as a result, are finally able to proceed onto the path to Rome unimpeded. Rome itself is described in divine terms, as “corona del mundo”, “reina de las ciudades”, “trono del lucimiento”, “fénix de las edades”, “entrada ca[t]ólica del cielo”, and, most crucially for our purposes here, as “esfera de los grandes ingenios”.

Through the episode of 3.IX, Critilo and Andrenio have not only proven their skills in the remit of prudence, but have also proven that their *ingenio*, the faculty that Gracián had previously associated with the *concepto/agudeza*, is sharp. As such, in the same way that *ingenio* is the faculty which enables man to perceive and express connections which elevate him to a state of aesthetic rapture, *ingenio* is also the faculty which enables man to perceive the connections between temporal planes necessary to implement prudence. As Andreu Celma states,

El ingenio es la facultad con la que el hombre puede percibir la vinculación de todas las cosas; la actividad ingeniosa tiene como meta específica la aprensión de la realidad en sus conexiones. Conocer ingeniosamente es sumergirse en el extremado activo de la realidad interconexa (184).

*Ingenio*, as the faculty which allows man to “percibir la vinculación de todas las cosas”, and whose aim is to enable man to comprehend “la realidad en sus conexiones”, is therefore equally applicable in the realm of morality as it is in the realm of epistemology/aesthetics: the former leading to virtuous action within reality, and the latter leading to temporary, universal ‘knowledge’ of the interconnectedness of reality. In this way, in *El Criticón*, Gracián extends the remit of *ingenio* to morality, with the result that morality, aesthetics, and epistemology collapse into one another: to act morally is to embody the aesthetic and this transient embodiment represents the only insight into the universal that man can hope to access or portray in the worldly realm (the impossibility of direct and permanent access to Truth/the universal having been repeatedly demonstrated to be beyond man’s cognitive abilities in 1.II, 2.IV, and 3.III).

That Critilo and Andrenio have reached the pinnacle of their apprenticeship in prudence is evidenced in the stress that Gracián places on *desengaño* in the rest of

3.IX and in 3.X. In 3.IX, having arrived in Rome, Critilo and Andrenio come across El Cortesano who, upon learning that the pair are seeking Felisinda, doubts that they will find her anywhere in Rome, and instead leads them to the Spanish Ambassador's residence where they witness a tertulia, the topic of which is precisely "en qué consiste la felicidad humana" (731). Here, various attendees offer their opinion on the nature of Happiness. For example, that Happiness consists in the accumulation of goods in life, such as honour, pleasure, riches, health, knowledge, and friends; that Happiness consists in not striving for anything; and that Happiness consists in having experienced unhappiness. However, the figure of Mascardo speaks definitively in this dialogue when he states,

Yo tengo por máxima con otros muchos que no hay dicha ni desdicha, felicidad o infelicidad, sino prudencia o imprudencia, digo que toda la felicidad humana consiste en tener prudencia, y la desventura en no tenerla. El varón sabio no teme la fortuna, antes es señor de ella y vive sobre los astros, superior a toda dependencia: nada le puede empecer, cuando él mismo no se daña. Y concluyo con que en todo lo que llena la cordura no cabe infelicidad (3.IX, 735).

Mascardo's declaration that "no hay dicha ni desdicha, felicidad o infelicidad, sino prudencia o imprudencia" recalls the instances that Gracián has stated similarly in his earlier treatises, showing that the point of view of Mascardo in this dialogue, in which prudence and earthly happiness are conflated, is very likely the one most closely aligned with that of Gracián.

For example: we read in *El Político*: "no fue afortunado Fernando, sino prudente, que la prudencia es madre de la buena dicha... todos los más prudentes príncipes fueron muy afortunados" (135); *Realce XXIII* of *El Discreto* states: "disponed bien los medios y conseguiréis vuestros intentos y desengañense todos los mortales... que no hay más dicha ni más desdicha que prudencia o imprudencia" (192); and we read in aphorism twenty-one of the *Oráculo*: "pero, bien filosofado, no hay otro arbitrio sino el de la virtud y atención, porque no hay más dicha ni más desdicha que prudencia o imprudencia" (224). While Gracián simply declares that prudence is the only form of worldly happiness that we can hope to achieve as unquestioningly true in his treatises, it takes him nearly the entirety of *El Criticón* to show the reader how he reaches this conclusion, for the reason that, in this later work, the reader is guided on the journey which culminates in this realisation alongside the novel's protagonists: having witnessed their successes and failures, the reader, just

like Critilo and Andrenio, has had to work in order to assimilate the novel's lessons of *medianía*, virtue, and prudence.

Mascardo points out that by embracing prudence as the closest to Happiness, and the closest to divinity, we can reach in the earthly realm one is able to forge one's own Fortune and to live "sobre los astros", indicating that prudence, through its connection to virtue, is connected to something more transcendental. As Moraleja Juárez points out, "podemos indicar que el sentido de la prudencia en la obra de Gracián tiene un carácter menos mundano – y por lo tanto menos práctico – del que a menudo se le reprocha" (1999: 87). Gracián intertwines the worldly and the other-worldly to such an extent that he often refers to both without making any overt differentiation. For example: Mascardo here offers prudence as the only available version of "felicidad humana", but, in delineating happiness in this way, he also highlights another kind of Happiness which is other-worldly and divine; likewise, when he states that "nada le puede empecer, cuando él mismo no se daña", it is likely that he is referring to the way in which prudence allows man to avoid harming himself spiritually, rather than in any other sense (i.e. that implementing prudence during life will lead to virtue which will, in turn, lead to the spiritual reward of life after death).

The interplay between, and the coexistence of, the worldly and the other-worldly realms is more explicitly highlighted when a *loco*, in Erasmian fashion, interrupts the tertulia to state, "de verdad, señor, que estos vuestros sabios son unos grandes necios, pues andan buscando por la tierra la que está en el cielo" (736), before swiftly making his exit. While Mascardo offers prudence as a version of happiness which is fitting to the earthly realm, Gracián does not end his deliberations here, with the *loco* bringing explicitly into question the possibility of other-worldly Happiness, "en el cielo". This leads El Cortesano to summarise the tertulia's proceedings when he states,

En vano, ¡oh peregrinos del mundo, pasajeros de la vida!, os cansáis en buscar desde la cuna a la tumba esta vuestra imaginada Felisinda, que el uno llama esposa, el otro madre: ya murió para el mundo y vive para el cielo. Hallarla heis allá, si la supiéredes merecer en la tierra (737).

The lesson that achieving Happiness, in a direct and permanent way, is impossible in the earthly world, and that their search for Felisinda has therefore been futile, represents one facet of Critilo and Andrenio's moment of *desengaño* within the novel,

which has been used by critics to argue for Gracián's Pessimism (Kassier 23, 25, 48; Aranguren 283, 291, 296; Robbins 1998: 70, 75; Robbins 2007: 221, 223).

However, another facet of the protagonists' *desengaño* lies in their realisation of how to attain Happiness in life after death. As Rabone points out,

The worldly passage from cradle to grave will never include Felisinda, but that does not make her an impossible goal: there is no doubt here that she remains accessible in an afterlife, as the certainty of 'hallarla heis allá' implies. The difficulty is how to reach her (208).

Whilst pure Happiness is unattainable in the earthly world, the value of man's earthly life lies in using it to, firstly, glimpse Happiness/the divine temporarily through acting virtuously and, secondly, to earn Happiness after death, also through virtuous action. Critilo and Andrenio were aiming to reach Felisinda in this world, and they fail in this endeavour. However, they instead learn how to reach her in the next world and, as such, "no alcanzan la meta que se habían propuesto, sino otra meta, la que les tenía pensado el autor" (Andersen 2008: 199). In this sense, Gracián has not pessimistically substituted prudence for other-worldly Happiness and immortality after death (Egido 2014: 330; Robbins 1998: 112), but, rather, he reveals how the former is intertwined with, and can lead to, the latter, offering man an optimistic plan of action towards the aim of spiritual salvation and permanent access to Happiness in life after death.

The impossibility of attaining Felisinda during life does not, therefore, lead Critilo and Andrenio into a pit of existential and pessimistic despair; instead, it reorients and elevates their focus, and leads them to an objective distance from earthly concerns. This is manifest in 3.X when El Cortesano takes them to the tallest of the seven hills of Rome in order to observe La Rueda del Tiempo. At this point, Critilo and Andrenio have lived their last day alive and now enter an other-worldly realm, which entails other-worldly, universal insight. El Cortesano gives them the glasses of prudence which allow them to step outside of linear chronology and to witness the past, the present, and the future in rapid succession with the turning of La Rueda del Tiempo (Egido 2000: 110–11; Andersen 2008: 197). Critilo and Andrenio then observe the way in which cities and empires rise, fall, and rebuild themselves with the passage of time: despite fluctuations in fashion and language, the earthly realm develops very little and remains inherently the same. El Cortesano explains that "lo mismo que fue, esso es y esso será sin discrepar ni un átomo. Lo que sucedió dozientos años ha, esso mismo estamos viendo agora" (3.X, 745), and that "ahí veréis que las cosas las mismas son que fueron, sola la memoria es la que falta" (746).

Realising that the lack of collective memory, and the lack of the transmission of wisdom through generations, is what causes humanity to make the same errors over and over again, Andrenio, recently schooled in the importance of learning from past experience, asks: “¿no se les podía tomar el pulso a las mudanças y el tino a la vicisitud de la rueda, para prevenir los remedios a los venideros males y saberlos desviar?”. To which El Cortesano replies: “ya se podría...pero como fenecieron aquellos que entonces vivían y suceden otros de nuevo sin recuerdo de los daños, sin experiencia de los inconvenientes, no queda lugar al escarmiento” (755).

Having criticised the unreliability of historians, particularly throughout part three of the novel, Gracián is here explaining why this unreliability is so harmful: without reliable texts which record historical events, humanity is unable to build a collective bank of past experiences from which it can learn. The result is that every age and every civilisation undergo the same suffering and learn from the same mistakes, but spend so much time doing so that they progress very little. History, accurately recorded, would allow humanity to implement prudence on a cosmic level, learning from what has come before, enabling it to bypass certain experiences and to progress more rapidly as a result. The immortalisation of people, feats, and deeds through writing and art contributes to the formation of collective memory and to the creation of an expansive bank of past experiences which humanity can draw upon in order to take prudent action and to cultivate virtue on a grand scale. In part two of the novel, we saw the way in which moral philosophy incorporates and surpasses history and its ability to grant fame, showing that fame therefore represents a reward for virtuous conduct and an example of virtuous conduct for future generations. Art and history, which bestow immortality and fame, are therefore intrinsically connected to the moral status of humanity as a whole, and to the possibility of its salvation. It is for this reason that Moraleja Juárez describes fame, in Gracián’s worldview, as the umbilical cord which connects man to the divine (1999: 110): fame, as a reward for virtuous conduct, represents a divine blessing, and future generations can therefore turn towards famous men to inform themselves of divinely sanctioned virtuous conduct. The perpetual turning of La Rueda del Tiempo, and the perpetual repetition of error that comes with it, can be, and has been, interpreted as evidence of Gracián’s worldly Pessimism (Andersen 2008: 197). However, just as he proposes that prudence is the method via which man can work towards earning Happiness, it is

evident that Gracián also puts forward immortalisation in art and writing as a remedy for humanity's collective tendency to err.

After passing through El Mesón de la Vida in 3.XI, where they come face to face with Muerte and realise that she should be welcomed joyfully and not feared, Critilo and Andrenio are then led by El Passagero/El Inmortal to an ornately carved boat which will carry them to La Isla de la Inmortalidad in 3.XII. The extent to which the immortality on offer here is worldly (i.e. fame in the earthly world) or other-worldly (i.e. Happiness in life after death/salvation) is the source of most of the disagreement in the interpretation of *El Criticón*. The conceptualisation of immortality as fame in the earthly world has led to pessimistic and secular readings of the text, whilst the conceptualisation of immortality as Happiness in life after death has led to assertions of Gracián as optimistic and religiously orthodox. This chapter has argued for an optimistic and inherently Christian interpretation of Gracián and his works, and the final *crisi* of the novel corroborates this approach in several ways.

Firstly, the references in this *crisi* to fame are marked by the association between fame and moral philosophy (and therefore salvation and Happiness) which Gracián has developed earlier in his novel. For example, El Inmortal immediately makes the connection between fame, memory, and future generations when he states at the beginning of the *crisi* that “eternízanse los grandes hombres en la memoria de los venideros, mas los communes yacen sepultados en el desprecio de los presentes y en el poco reparo de los que vendrán” (786). This reference to “los venideros” echoes Andrenio's question to El Cortesano at La Rueda del Tiempo, when he enquires about why those of the past do not warn those in the future against error in order to avoid the perpetual repetition of the same mistakes. In other words, immortalisation via fame is connected to the ability of others to learn from the past and subsequently to carry out moral action themselves. The description of “yacen sepultados en el desprecio de los presentes” also calls to mind the descent into nothingness of those who fail to distinguish themselves at La Cueva de la Nada. However, in this episode we learnt that man must reject nothingness in order to cultivate his status as a *persona*, a person of interior moral worth. Eternalisation in the memory of others is therefore not an end in itself. Rather, it is a welcome, but supplementary result of the rejection of nothingness and of the active choice to cultivate oneself as a *persona*.

The importance of choosing to live a virtuous life, and of turning away from nothingness, is stressed again when Critilo and Andrenio notice the darkness of the

sea which leads to La Isla de la Inmortalidad and ask El Inmortal if the waters represent the abyss of the river Lethe, a river of the underworld in Greek mythology which represents oblivion. El Inmortal replies that “está tan lejos de ser el golfo del olvido, que antes es el de la memoria, y perpetua”, and explains that “este color proviene de la preciosa tinta de los famosos escritores que en ella bañan sus plumas” (790). El Inmortal explains that the waters of the sea are so dark, not because they represent the void of nothingness, but because they are made up of the ink of famous writers, and that this ink is connected to “la memoria, y perpetua”, which is conceptualised as the opposite of “olvido”. Gracián is therefore depicting the duality between oblivion/nothingness and artistic immortalisation/fame, on the spectrum between which lies man’s endeavour to prove his moral worth: when man manages to achieve this with success, as a reward, his virtuous feats will be etched into the memory of others and, as a result, will hold sway over their conduct and over their moral status.

Secondly, the immortality on offer at La Isla de la Inmortalidad can be considered other-worldly for the reason that the island itself is repeatedly presented as an other-worldly realm. For example, before arriving, Andrenio asks El Inmortal, “¿hay relojes por allá?”, and receives the response, “no, por cierto, no son menester, que allí no pasan días por las personas” (788). The island is therefore an atemporal, universal place and this is depicted as the appropriate realm for “personas”. As they approach the island, the protagonists bathe in sensual and aesthetic luxury, listening to the singing of swans, hearing applause in the distance, smelling glorious aromas, and satisfying their understanding through harmonious conversation with each other. As they do so, we read that they “iban perdiendo tierra y ganando estrellas” (792). The idea of leaving the earthly world behind, and entering a more transcendent and aesthetic realm, is repeated when Andrenio, catching sight of the shore of the island in the distance, shouts, “tierra, tierra!”, and is corrected by El Inmortal with, “¡cielo, cielo!” (794). As Rabone too concludes from this episode, there is clearly something other-worldly about the immortality on offer here (209). This displacement of the worldly realm culminates with an instance of prosopopoeia, when El Inmortal channels the voice of God, stating,

“Advierte que está en tu mano el vivir eternamente. Procura tú ser famoso obrando hazañosamente, trabaja por ser insigne, ya en las armas, ya en las letras, en el gobierno; y lo que es sobre todo, sé eminente en la virtud, sé heroico y serás eterno, vive a la fama y serás

inmortal. No hagas caso, no, de esa material vida en que los brutos te exceden; estima, sí, la de la honra y de la fama. Y entiende esta verdad, que los insignes hombres nunca mueren” (794).

The voice of God here combines virtue, heroism, fame, and immortality into a causal chain in which the result of virtuous conduct will be eternal life. The other-worldliness of this version of eternal life is evidenced by God’s imploring to man that he do not esteem “essa material vida”, populated by “los brutos”. Furthermore, Gracián uses God’s speech to reiterate the idea that the possibility of carrying out virtuous conduct, and of earning eternal life, is a generous opportunity granted by the Grace of God, which must be actively accepted by man through the activation of his free will. We see this when God states that “está en tu mano el vivir eternamente”: immortality is not granted by blind Fortune, predetermined by Providence, or guaranteed upon birth; immortality is the reward for choosing to follow the path of virtue and this requires ceaseless dedication throughout one’s life. For this reason, the “sudor de los héroes” of the island is described as “un olor tan celestial” (810): with each difficult and arduous activation of virtue, man channels divinity, and the culmination of these activations will be access to perpetual divinity in life after death.

Kassier argues that the necessity that man continuously manifest his virtue throughout his life, presented in *El Criticón*, represents a process of “almost ritualistic repetition” (23), which is “arduously challenging and tedious” (25). He goes on to state: “at one and the same time temporal existence is an intrinsically worthless succession of experiences that, threatening man’s moral extinction, still requires his total dedication and enthusiasm, challenging him to persevere and survive” (133–4). Kassier interprets the repetitive structure of *El Criticón* as representative of Gracián’s belief that man must simply survive the world, keeping his head above water, without making progress or developing in any sense, and without the prospect of any reward for his efforts. This chapter has already argued extensively for the development in time of Critilo and Andrenio’s skills in the remits of virtue and prudence. The value of this development, and the value of Critilo and Andrenio’s experiences, is evident in the closing lines of the novel, in which Mérito considers their candidacy for La Mansión de la Eternidad:

Púsose a examinarla muy de propósito y comenzó a arquear las cejas, haziendo ademanes de admirado. Y cuando la vio calificada con tantas rúbricas de la filosofía en el gran teatro del universo, de la razón y sus luzes en el valle de las fieras, de la atención en la entrada del mundo, del propio conocimiento en la anatomía moral del hombre, de la entereza en el mal

passo del salteo, de la circunspección en la fuente de los engaños, de la advertencia en el golfo cortesano, del escarmiento en casa de Falsirena, de la sagacidad en las ferias generales, de la cordura en la reforma universal, de la curiosidad en casa de Salastano, de la generosidad en la cárcel del oro, del saber en el museo del discreto, de la singularidad en la plaza del vulgo, de la dicha en las gradas de la fortuna, de la solidez en el yermo de Hipocri[n]da, del valor en su arm[er]ía, de la virtud en su palacio encantado, de la reputación entre los tejados de vidrio, del señorío en el trono del mando, del juicio en la jaula de todos, de la autoridad entre los horrores y honores de Vejecia, de la templança en el estanco de los vicios, de la verdad pariendo, del desengaño en el mundo descrifrado, de la cautela en el palacio sin puerta, del saber reinando, de la humildad en casa de la hija sin padres, del valer mucho en la cueva de la nada, de la felicidad descubierta, de la constancia en la rueda del tiempo, de la vida en la muerte, de la fama en la Isla de la Inmortalidad: les franqueó de par en par el arco de los triunfos a la mansión de la Eternidad (812).

Via Mérito, Gracián offers a summary of Critilo and Andrenio's experiences throughout the course of their lifetimes, closing his novel with the type of reflection and projection which is encapsulated in the idea of prudence: Mérito reflects upon Critilo and Andrenio's past, using it to evaluate their present worth, in order to make a decision regarding their future. Kassier stresses that this recapitulation of Critilo and Andrenio's lives eschews any notion of progression and emphasises the worthless nature of their experiences (25). However, it is evident that Mérito, "haziendo ademanes de admirado", in fact, admires these experiences and judges them to be of great value, having allowed the protagonists to develop and to refine the skills and insight necessary in order for them to earn access to La Mansión de la Eternidad.

Part three of the novel ends without a thirteenth *crisi* which has been interpreted by some critics as evidence of Gracián's doubts over the existence of an afterlife (Blüher 558; Kassier 23; Blanco 551; Egginton 161). Instead, he calls upon his readers to live a life similar to Critilo and Andrenio in order to earn access to La Mansión de la Eternidad and to find out themselves what happens there: "lo que allí vieron, lo mucho que lograron, quien quisiere saberlo y experimentarlo, tome el rumbo de la virtud insigne, del valor heroico, y llegará a parar al teatro de la fama, al trono de la estimación y al centro de la inmortalidad" (812). Egido describes this deference to the reader as a "final sin fin", in which "el final celeste queda en suspenso" (2014: 348 and 329, respectively). However, Kassier himself points out that thirteen *crisis* represents an uncomfortable prolongation which heightens the sense of a frustrated climax to parts one and two of the novel (43). Twelve *crisis*, on the other hand, reflects a sense of harmony and contentment. On this basis, the lack of a thirteenth *crisi* to part three of the novel not only activates the participation of the reader; it also reflects Critilo and Andrenio's permanent attainment of divine, other-

worldly Happiness with much more faith, respect, and reverence than a mimetic approach towards depicting La Mansión de la Eternidad could ever hope to achieve.

Having established the importance of virtue in part two of the novel, Gracián uses part three of *El Criticón* to establish the centrality in his worldview of prudence. Prudence is successfully shown to be reliant upon correct perception (3.III–V), acquired through experience (3.VI), practised through rational deliberation (3.VIII), and perfected when implemented instinctively and spontaneously (3.IX), showing that it functions in the same way as *ingenio*, as set out in the previous chapter. We then see that prudence is instrumental in the process of *desengaño*, as man comes to realise that reaching Happiness is impossible on earth and that only a prudent approach to the world will enable him both to channel temporarily the divine during life and to earn Happiness after death (3.IX). Finally, Gracián uses part three of the novel to reflect further upon the intertwining of worldly fame and moral philosophy, again showing that fame is not an end in itself. Rather, incorporated by moral philosophy, fame functions as a tool in the armour of morality, which allows those in the future to learn from the past experience of others and to act morally as a result (3.X–XII).

Between part two and part three of *El Criticón* we witness a general shift in focus from action to contemplation; from learning through active participation in the world, “con los vivos”, to learning through peaceful deliberation, “consigo mismo” (*El Discreto*, XXV, 200). As Andersen describes,

El hombre logrado en *El Criticón* ya no es, como en *El Héroe*, un hombre que triunfa en el mundo sino un hombre contemplativo y sabio, un hombre desengañado que comprende su verdadera situación y circunstancia, comprende su propia condición de ser, su existencia, y, con ello, la posibilidad que le da el mundo en el que vive (2008: 206).

As such, while Gracián’s thoughts turn towards other-worldly life after death, the remit within which this focus is played out remains the earthly realm: the *persona* cultivated by *El Criticón* does not abstract himself from the world in contemplation of the divine because he knows this to be beyond his remit. Rather, Gracián’s *persona* is ontologically situated firmly within the earthly realm, fully aware of the limits and possibilities of this realm, and determined to utilise them to his spiritual, and not his worldly, advantage: the *persona* cannot access the divine directly, so he instead uses his *ingenio* to channel the divine using prudence and virtue. The *persona* knows that the divine channelled in this way is transient, so he tirelessly refreshes his access to it

throughout the course of his life. As a result, the *persona* refines his faculty of *ingenio*, his virtue, and his skills in prudence to such a degree that they become instinctive and second nature. And the *persona* knows that, eventually, his carefully honed ability to implement prudence and to actualise virtue instinctively and spontaneously will be rewarded with permanent access to the divine after death. Given that Gracián repeatedly demonstrates that man lacks the cognitive ability to understand, or even to conceptualise, Truth/the divine/the universal, it is fitting that he chooses not to depict the divine realm in a final, thirteenth *crisi* to part three of the novel. As Romera-Navarro and Coster also argue, for a reader of Gracián's time, the depiction of immortality after death would have been wholly gratuitous, for the simple reason that it was "sobreentendido en el ánimo de todos" (Romera-Navarro 1928: 27–8), and that the existence of a supreme form of immortality was never placed in any doubt (Coster 163).

### *Conclusion*

The purpose of this chapter has been primarily to demonstrate three aspects of Gracián's thought in *El Criticón*: his adherence to Christian theology, his Optimism, and his transposition of the intellectual faculty of *ingenio* from the realms of ontology, epistemology, and aesthetics into the realm of morality. Gracián's religious orthodoxy is evident in his acceptance of the Christian paradox between free will and Fortune/Providence, and in his focus on earning salvation after death, even if explicit references to Christianity are fewer than would be expected from a Jesuit priest of this time.<sup>55</sup> Gracián's Optimism is evident in his belief in man's moral perfectibility and in the possibility that he therefore offers man of accessing Happiness after death, and in the positive plan of action that he proposes towards this aim, through the cultivation of virtue and the implementation of prudence. And Gracián's transposition of *ingenio* into the realm of morality is evident through his conflation of it with prudence. Prudence, in its ability to draw connections between the past, the present, and the future, leading to a channelling of the divine through the actualisation of virtue, functions in the same way as *ingenio*: just as the *concepto/agudeza* leads to

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<sup>55</sup> It is worth noting in this respect that Romera-Navarro points out that the references to religion in *El Criticón* are more frequent than in Quevedo's *Sueños* or *El Buscón* (1938: 28).

*admiración*/aesthetic rapture, virtue also grants transient insight into the divine. As such, man himself, in the moment of acting virtuously, becomes a *concepto/agudeza*. Acting morally therefore becomes a kind of aesthetic experience in which the universal/the divine is momentarily accessed and epistemology, aesthetics, and morality coalesce.

Unexpectedly for such a philosophical writer, Gracián does not seek to transmit knowledge or to impart Truth in *El Criticón*. Rather, he seeks to impart a kind of apprehension of the world which finds its roots not in understanding, but in emotion; not in comprehension, but in its opposite: in overwhelming incomprehension experienced as *admiratio*. In the fictional guise of *El Criticón* Gracián finally succeeds in finding the appropriate form for this content.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

### *Thesis Summary*

This thesis has taken the critical stance that Gracián is religiously orthodox and fundamentally optimistic due to his belief in man's ability to perfect his moral status and, therefore, to attain salvation after death. Its argument has been that Gracián's belief in man's perfectibility is manifest through his conceptualisation of the cardinal virtue of prudence as a form of *ingenio*; that is, a form of practical reason which can be honed through conscious and rational deliberation and practice, but which reaches its perfection when implemented instinctively, intuitively, and spontaneously.

Chapter one of this thesis showed that this argument continues recent critical trends in three ways: by interpreting Gracián as religiously orthodox and optimistic, due to the stress he places on morality, virtue, and salvation; by paying more attention to Gracián's 'philosophy', outlined primarily in the *Agudeza*, and by intertwining this with his more social and political works; and by keeping in mind the Christian and Jesuit context in which Gracián was writing, particularly the acceptance and incorporation of paradox that this context entailed.

Chapter two of this thesis examined the intellectual context within which Gracián was working in order to show that the various paradoxes which mark his works, such as those between the human and the divine, the worldly and the other-worldly, and Pessimism and Optimism, also mark philosophical thinking more generally. Through an examination of Neo-Platonism, Scepticism, Neo-Stoicism, and Jesuit doctrine, this chapter showed the way in which the stress placed on either side of these dualities has fluctuated throughout time. The Jesuits, like the Neo-Platonists before them, sought reconciliation. The reconciliatory attitude of the *Compañía de Jesús* is particularly manifest in its Aristotelian and Thomistic conceptualisation of the cardinal virtue of prudence, which stipulates that prudence cannot be purely intellectual, and must also incorporate action to be fully realised.

Chapter three of this thesis analysed *El Héroe*, *El Político*, *El Discreto* and the *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*, showing that Gracián's earlier works were marked by interpretative indeterminacy. At this point, he was grappling with the various dualities which marked his philosophical era, leaving scope for much critical disagreement. Nevertheless, even in these early texts, Gracián's 'philosophy', namely

the epistemological and aesthetic functions of *ingenio*, was already well established. Throughout the course of the treatises, there also emerges a growing stress on the importance of prudence and virtue, which would go on to take centre stage in *El Criticón*.

Chapter four of this thesis concentrated on Gracián's 'philosophy', examined through the ideas of *ingenio*, *agudeza*, and the *concepto*, outlined in the *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*. This chapter examined the contradictory title of this text, concluding that the implementation of *ingenio* should ideally be instinctive, meaning that the *concepto* in the mind and the production of the exterior *agudeza* are simultaneous and ontologically dependent. However, it also examined the scope that Gracián grants for *ingenio* to be moulded by practice, meaning that man has the potential to perfect his *ingenio* until it implements itself intuitively and without a rational, deliberative process. This chapter also considered the epistemological ramifications of *ingenio*, showing that the transient *admiratio* induced in the moment in which the *concepto/agudeza* is perceived/articulated is akin to the moment of aesthetic rapture, meaning that the *concepto/agudeza* provides temporary awareness of and insight into universality and divinity.

Chapter five of this thesis analysed *El Criticón*, arguing that, in this later text, Gracián extends the remit of *ingenio*, from ontology, aesthetics, and epistemology, to incorporate the philosophical branch of morality too. He does so by depicting prudence as a form of *ingenio* and by thereby showing that man himself, in the moment of carrying out virtuous conduct informed by prudence, becomes a *concepto/agudeza*, which grants him temporary insight into and awareness of the universal/divine. Like *ingenio*, prudence, in its most perfect form, occurs intuitively, with no temporal lag between cognition and action, but can also be refined through deliberated practice. Critilo and Andrenio refine their skills within the remit of prudence in this way throughout *El Criticón*, finally learning to implement it instinctively in part three, representing their attainment of moral perfection, which then leads to their salvation after death.

Whilst the importance of *ingenio* and prudence was manifest in *El Héroe*, *El Político*, *El Discreto*, and in the *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*, it is only in the *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* and in *El Criticón* that they are articulated by Gracián in such a way as to impress their centrality to his worldview, and in such a way as to reveal their profound influence on all branches of his philosophy: ontology,

epistemology, aesthetics, and morality. Ontologically, Gracián's philosophical viewpoint is that *ser* and *parecer*, man and the world, are interdependent. Epistemologically and aesthetically, Gracián's philosophical viewpoint is that epistemological certainty is beyond man's cognitive abilities and that the only universal 'knowledge' that he can access is synonymous with Beauty. Morally, Gracián's philosophical viewpoint is that man is perfectible and that he can achieve moral perfection, and salvation, through the repeated implementation of prudence and the repeated activation of virtue throughout his life. The closing section of this thesis will illustrate in more detail the way in which these philosophical viewpoints are not only compatible with Gracián's religious orthodoxy, but also complement and bolster it.

*A note on "El Comulgatorio": An Explicit Assertion of the Corporeal Ontology of Catholicism*

*El Comulgatorio*, a deeply religious work written in fifty *meditaciones*, in which Gracián prepares his reader for the sacrament of the Eucharist, was published in 1655 between parts two and three of *El Criticón*. At this point Gracián was facing mounting criticism for publishing apparently profane works without the permission of the *Compañía de Jesús*, and the *Compañía* itself was facing criticism for allowing Gracián to retain his position as Cátedra de Escritura in Zaragoza, in spite of his insubordination. For this reason, many interpreters have considered *El Comulgatorio* as a wholly artificial, disingenuous concession to his superiors (as outlined by Río Nogueras 118), the aim of which was to ward off the criticism which was expected upon the publication of the third part of *El Criticón*. Nevertheless, other critics have pointed out that the seeds of *El Comulgatorio* are present in *discurso LIII* of the *Agudeza*, in which Gracián stresses the importance of receiving the Eucharist frequently (Río Nogueras 120; Correa Calderón 1961: 101–2; Egido 2003: lvi), leading to the alternative conclusion that *El Comulgatorio* represents "la culminación de una trayectoria literaria previa" (Egido 2003: liii). Despite this critical dissent, and despite its steady popularity in Spain and elsewhere, *El Comulgatorio* is, by a wide margin, Gracián's least studied work (Correa Calderón 1961: 198; Río Nogueras 117, 121). The brief discussion of *El Comulgatorio* to follow will examine the way in which the ontological ramifications of the rite of the Eucharist, namely the focus on

corporeality and the acceptance of the paradoxical union of the infinite and the finite, infuse Gracián's prior works and that, as a consequence, *El Comulgatorio* is consistent with, and culminates, his other texts.

The Eucharist, or Communion, is a Christian sacrament which commemorates the Last Supper, during which Jesus gave his disciples bread and wine to consume and commanded them to repeat this action in his memory, the bread representing his body and the wine representing his blood. Each time that the Eucharist is received, the presence of Christ is actualised within man's body. Catholic doctrine, in particular, asserts that transubstantiation takes place during the process of the Eucharist, meaning that the substance of the bread and wine materially transforms into the body and blood of Christ. On the other hand, other sects of Christianity, such as Protestantism, tend to assert that, whilst Christ is spiritually present during the rite of the Eucharist, the bread and wine do not alter their material substance. In spite of there being no logical explanation to account for transubstantiation, Catholic dogma accepts the mystery of this process as an article of faith.

The belief in transubstantiation highlights the ontological materialism of Catholic dogma: God, via Christ, asserts his existence on earth materially and corporeally, after an act of ingestion, and it is not the case that man can shirk his bodily form and bodily functions in order to reach God intellectually or spiritually while living in the worldly realm. This focus on corporeality is manifest in *El Comulgatorio*, initially through the comparison of the rite of the Eucharist with the conception of Jesus in Mary's womb (I, 18), and subsequently through the extensive use of the language of food and digestion throughout the entire text.<sup>56</sup> For its depiction of the corporeal ontology of Catholicism, Cantarino describes *El Comulgatorio* as,

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<sup>56</sup> See, for example, the closing lines of *El Comulgatorio*, in which an angel addresses man on his deathbed, emphasises his corporeality through reference to the eyes, mouth, tongue, chest, heart, and intestines, and intertwines this with divinity and immortality: "...Fija en este blanco esos ojos que tan presto se han de cerrar para nunca más ver en esta mortal vida; sean perenes fuentes de llanto hoy las que mañana se han de secar; esa boca, que tan presto se ha de cerrar para nunca más abrirse, ábrela hoy y dilátala bien, para que te la llene de dulzura este sabroso manjar; advierte que es maná escondido, y te endulzará el amargo trago de la muerte que por puntos te amenaza. Dé voces esa lengua, pidiendo perdón; ese corazón, que tan presto ha de parar en manjar de gusanos, apacientese del verdadero cuerpo de Cristo, que se llamó gusano de la tierra; esas entrañas, que por instantes van perdiendo el aliento de la vida, confórtense con esta confección de la inmortalidad; y todo tú, hermano mío, que tan en breve has de resolverte en polvo y en ceniza, procura transformarte en este Señor sacramentado, para que de esa suerte Él permanezca en ti y tú en Él por toda una eternidad de gloria" (L, 206).

La clave de bóveda de la obra graciana; ni más ni menos que el fondo de su ‘ontología cristiana’ desde la que no sólo se hace inteligible el resto de la obra cortesana de Gracián, su antropología, su ética y su política, sino, sobre todo, el aspecto más trascendental, el que explica el pesimismo crítico que rezuman sus textos, porque es esta ontología católica del ‘Corpus Christi’ la que explica los límites gnoseológicos [epistemológicos] del imperio español (9).

Cantarino argues that Gracián’s Catholic, corporeal ontology informs his ethics and politics, providing an explanation for the approach he takes in his “obra cortesana”: God becomes present in the world physically and corporeally, meaning that man too, instead of introspectively retreating inwards, must accept his own physicality and corporeality through engagement and interaction with the exterior world. However, man’s inherent subjectivity, and inability to overcome the barrier of his own body, mean that he is limited epistemologically and can never obtain epistemological objectivity or certainty.

Pérez Herranz also highlights the centrality of *El Comulgatorio*, and of the sacrament of the Eucharist, in Gracián’s worldview and ontology, stating,

Pues la sustancia infinita de la ontología general y los modos finitos entran en contacto físicamente a través de la Eucaristía. Al olvidar este plano de la ontología general (más que de la teología) de Gracián, no sólo se comete injusticia con el aragonés, sino que se oculta una parte esencial de la realidad considerada en la órbita del mundo católico (2002: 53).

Here, Pérez Herranz highlights the paradox regarding the way in which an infinite God is incorporated “físicamente” within the finite body of man during the Eucharist. Despite the inexplicability of this process, he argues that the belief in the physical union of the infinite and the finite, of the divine and the human, makes up “una parte esencial” of the way in which the “mundo católico” conceptualises reality. Failing to take this paradox into account leads to a limited understanding of works by Catholic writers and thinkers.

The corporeal ontology of Catholicism stands in contrast to an alternative ontology which began to arise prior to Gracián’s time (in the work of Machiavelli, Luther, and Copernicus), which was consolidated during his time (in the work of Kepler, Galileo, and Descartes), and which came to dominate philosophical and scientific thinking after his time (in the work of Newton and during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century) (Pérez Herranz 2006: 35). Prior to this revolution in thought, theology and philosophy were intertwined: philosophical enquiry took as its starting point the metaphysical foundations of the prevailing

Catholic theology of the time, including, for example, the fundamental belief in God, the belief in the immortality of the soul, the belief in the possibility of salvation, the belief in the importance of morality, and the belief in a corporeal ontology which dictates that existence is necessarily material, bodily, and physical. Throughout the works of the aforementioned thinkers, philosophy became increasingly secularised and detached from the metaphysical bases of Catholic theology. With the work of Descartes, in particular, the conceptualisation of ontology as necessarily corporeal was rejected: in the search for epistemological certainty, Descartes turned away from the external world, scorned that which was corporeal about man (the body, the passions, the senses, the imagination), and asserted that proof of man's existence was only to be found in his intellect. Therefore, for Descartes, and in contrast to Catholic dogma of the time, only that which is incorporeal about man contributes to his ontological status as a being with existence.

The Cartesian view that man's immaterial intellect, or reason, forms a stable and static criterion of truth, which proves that man exists, and which provides a basis upon which other knowledge can be built, represents both an ontological and an epistemological divergence from Catholic thinking: whilst Gracián, for example, sought insight into and experience of the divine, based upon feeling rather than cognition, in aesthetic fashion, Descartes sought concrete understanding of divinity and of God's creation. As a mathematician, Descartes believed that the world was programmed by God in a logical and rational language, which man could decode and learn to read using his divinely inspired reason, allowing him to arrive at, and subsequently to deduce, certain knowledge. This conceptualisation of man's intellect/reason, as an incorporeal faculty which resides within him statically and unchangingly, providing stable proof of his existence, and serving as a foundation to the framework in which epistemological certainty can be attained, is problematic from the point of view of Catholicism.

Pérez Herranz explains that, for Catholics of the time, gaining knowledge about the world,

No significa que el sujeto tenga que alejarse del mundo radicalmente, que haya que optar por el sujeto (*res cogitans*) de un lado y por el mundo mecanicista (*res extensa*) de otro, como hará el racionalismo francés a imagen y semejanza de Descartes. Gracián es anti-cartesiano [...] (como lo es la filosofía hispana en general): la vida humana está dada *in medias res* – un *cogito puro* es puro disparate (2002: 63).

Whilst Descartes sets out to outline, precisely, a *cogito puro*, a stable, unchanging, and incorporeal facet within man which proves his existence, Gracián, and writers of Catholic Spain generally, insist that man exists within a particular context, as a product of the constant interplay between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. The consequences of this are twofold: firstly, there is no fixed framework within which to build epistemological certainty and, secondly, man himself is indeterminate, constantly reconfiguring himself in response to the particularity of circumstances. He has no fixity upon which to build epistemological certainty and instead represents “ese ser no determinado que se va creando en su acción misma”, playing the role of “un actor que vive el papel que representa” (Pérez Herranz 2002: 60 and 72, respectively). In other words, man’s existence cannot be internal and must necessarily be exteriorised, asserted through the way he decides to act in the present moment. When this moment has passed, he must recalibrate and again decide how to act in order to re-assert his existence, and this process must be repeated incessantly throughout the course of his lifetime. For Gracián, and for Catholic Spaniards generally, existence is not static, atemporal, or intellectual. Rather, it is contingent and must be continually asserted through action in the worldly realm: there can be no ‘pure’ existence without exterior, bodily form; no *ser* without *parecer*. Failing to realise this, and failing to assert one’s existence in the worldly realm through action, leads to non-existence and descent into nothingness.

This conceptualisation of existence, in which *ser* and *parecer* are ontologically dependent on each other and in which existence must continually be re-asserted, is depicted in the *Agudeza*, in relation to the *agudeza/concepto*, which ideally come into being simultaneously, with no temporal lag between cognition and the product of cognition, and which must be constantly regenerated by *ingenio* in order to reignite a sense of *admiratio*; in *El Criticón*, in relation to the idea that the virtue which results from moral action reaches its perfection when the steps of cognition and action are simultaneous, is never attained in perpetuity, and must be constantly refreshed and re-actualised during life via prudence; and in *El Comulgatorio*, in relation to the necessity that man receive the Eucharist in order to reanimate and revitalise the physical presence of divinity within his human, finite form, and the necessity that this rite be repeated regularly and frequently throughout life. Just as receiving the Eucharist actualises the physical presence of the divine within man, the moment of the *agudeza/concepto*, via *ingenio*, and the moment of

virtue, via prudence, also both lead to the actualisation of divinity within man. Whilst in *El Comulgatorio* Gracián explicitly endorses the corporeal ontology of the Eucharist in unequivocally religious terms, his other works also clearly depict the same Catholic ontology, simply cloaked in the seemingly secular language of *ingenio* and prudence.

Faced with challenges such as the Machiavellian secularisation of morality and the Lutheran Protestant Reformation, Catholic Spaniards were obliged to defend the metaphysical bases of their faith. Chapter one of Session Thirteen of the Council of Trent, chaired in October 1551, is dedicated specifically to defending the belief in transubstantiation during the rite of the Eucharist (Pérez Herranz 2006: 40), showing that the assertion of a corporeal ontology was of particular concern to the Counter Reformation. In Spain of this time, literature and art were seen as tools in the armour of religion which could be used to disseminate religious orthodoxy in a more accessible, and often in a seemingly secular, way (Robbins 1998: 34–7; Andersen 2008: 9). This commingling of the worldly and the other-worldly was both the objective and the speciality of the *Compañía de Jesús*. Through his dissemination of a Catholic, corporeal ontology via the seemingly secular concepts of *ingenio* and prudence, Gracián shows his ability to assert a religiously orthodox metaphysics under a worldly disguise, in conformity with the founding precepts of his Order. Under pressure from accusations of excessive secularity, with the publication of *El Comulgatorio*, Gracián asserts his mastery of the spiritual and other-worldly side of the Jesuit endeavour.

In the process of the Eucharist man is not elevated to the spiritual heights of the divine. Instead, divinity is corporealised, the only form of existence which man can comprehend, representing a humanisation of the divine, rather than a divinisation of man. Throughout *El Comulgatorio*, as elsewhere in his writing, Gracián stresses the necessity of reconciling humanity with divinity, writing, for example, that whilst receiving the Eucharist, man must think about God, “representándole humano y gozándole divino” (I, 19). Despite accusations by critics such as Blüher and Forcione, that Gracián’s excessively worldly focus tears apart the cord between man and God and severs man from other-worldly concerns (527 and 1997: 35, respectively), it is evident, especially in *El Comulgatorio*, that this is not the case. When Gracián writes in the *Oráculo* that “hanse de procurar los medios humanos como si no hubiese divinos y los divinos como si no hubiese humanos. Regla de gran maestro [Saint

Ignatius of Loyola]; no hay que añadir comentario” (251, 328), it is clear that what was once implicitly understood by this aphorism has been largely forgotten and that, in fact, more focused attention needs to be paid to the Jesuits’ dual dedication to worldly and other-worldly concerns. Gracián is not a writer whose focus is ultimately worldly or secular, but he lived during an age of increasing secularisation (Ayala Martínez 2001: 24, 27). His response, in conformity with the *Compañía de Jesús*, is to humanise divinity, and to transmit religious orthodoxy, under the guise of *ingenio* and prudence, in such a way that it can be assimilated by those both less trained in and less motivated by the dense theology and abstract metaphysics of Catholicism.

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