

As Villagr  portrays the battle scenes, he must struggle to understand the reasoning and actions of the enemy. The voices of the Acomans are heard, both male and female, as husbands take leave of their families. A leading Acoman is present in the war council with a laudatory epithet attached to his name: "el valeroso Bempol" "the valorous Bempol." Gicombo's wife Luzcoija is

Vna famosa b rbara gallarda  
Que por su gran belleza y trato noble  
Era reverenciada y acatada  
De todo aqueste fuerte y sus contornos . . . (228)

Enrique Lamadrid notes that "like Julius Caesar and Thucydides before him, P rez de Villagr  invents rather than reports the speeches of his adversaries," (Lamadrid 165). This is how Villagr  describes the ferocious response of the Acomans to Zald var's demand that they surrender:

Arrojando de flechas grande suma,  
Como rabiosos perros respondieron  
No les tratasen desto y que apretasen  
Las armas y los dientes con los pu os,  
Porque ellos y sus hijos y mugeres  
Era fuerza acabasen y rindiessen  
Sus vidas y sus almas y sus honras  
En las lides presentes. Y con esto,  
Combatiendo furiosos, embest an,  
A morir o vencer, con tanta fuerza  
Que pasmo y grima a todos nos causaba. (271)

Nevertheless, Sald var's battle plan calls for the Spaniards to scale the mesa on the first night and they position a small cannon behind the defenders. On the second day of the battle the attackers gain the upper hand and set fire to the pueblo. As the fighting intensifies and the Acomans refuse to surrender, the tragic qualities of the struggle, and of the poem, come into play:

Y as , los brutos, b rbaros, furiosos,  
Vi ndose ya vencidos, se mataban  
Los vnos a los otros, de manera  
Que el hijo al padre y padre al caro hijo  
La vida le quitaba, y, dem s desto,  
Al fuego, juntos, otros ayudaban  
Porque con m s vigor se lebantase  
Y el pueblo consumiessse y abrasase. (272)

Villagr  compares the suicidal despair of the Acomans to the most cruel and tragic figures of classical mythology. In Canto XXXII the sisters of the noble Zutancalpo recover the body of their dead brother from the battlefield. Zutancalpo opposed the decision of their father, Zutacap n, to kill Juan de Sald var and his soldiers. The sisters lay the body of the young man on a heavy plank and carry it in funereal procession to the flaming ruin of Zutancalpo's house. There the mother awaits:

Y luego que la madre desdichada  
 Tuvo delante de sus tristes ojos  
 El horrendo espectáculo que vido,  
 Sin piedad desgarrándose la cara  
 Y la madeja suelta de cabellos,  
 Así empezó la pobre a lamentarse . . . (277)

The grieving sisters join their mother:

Y vertiendo de lágrimas gran lluvia,  
 Con el bravo dolor y amor fogoso  
 Del trágico furor eternizada,  
 Cien mil gemidos tristes redoblaba  
 Que del ansiado pecho le salían.  
 Y como la desesperada furia  
 Es el más cruel y capital verdugo  
 De aquél que semejante mal padece,  
 Así, desesperada y con despecho,  
 Sobre vn gran fuego se lanzó de espaldas.  
 Y tras della las quatro hermanas tristes  
 También allí quisieron abrazarse  
 Sobre el querido hermano ya difunto . . . (277-78)

In these tragic scenes, which critics have tended to ignore, Villagrà's voice rises to the height of its poetic expression, humanizing the natives in their desperation and defeat. While the Spaniards have the consolation of Christian redemption for their dead, the Indians demonstrate a proud stoicism worthy of noble pagans such as the ancient Romans and Trojans. These scenes produce a blending of the poem's historical and poetic discourses, and historians such as Bancroft and Bandelier have noted the combination of epic and tragic genres in the *Historia*. Although the poem portrays the destruction of one Pueblo, in effect, it marks the beginning of the end of the Indian world. In the final part of the *Historia* we see Villagrà's reason for rendering the chronicle in verse form: it was a history that demanded to be sung, and having lived and witnessed it, he felt compelled to sing it. Accordingly, these verses sing the indomitable pride of the defeated Indians:

Passada esta tragedia prodigiosa,  
 Paréceme, señor, que nos bolvamos  
 Al sin ventura puesto donde queda  
 El pobre General y bravo Bempol  
 Que, como apunto y queda referido,  
 Qual aquellos illustres Bruto y Casio,  
 Que quisieron privarse de la vida  
 Por sólo que se vieron ya vencidos,  
 Así, por no vivir jamás sugetos,  
 El vno fue saliendo a despeñarse  
 Y el otro a sólo dar injusta muerte  
 A su amada Luzcoija, por no verla  
 En manos de Españoles que pudiessen

Gozar de su belleza malograda. (281)

As he considers Acoma's precipitous fall, Bempol delivers a critique of over-zealous nationalism:

¡O Acoma, a qué Dios has ofendido,  
 O por qué causa los altos dioses  
 Quieren contra nosotros enojarse!  
 ¿Súfrese que tal ira y tal tal coraje  
 Muestren dioses, y más contra vna fuerza  
 Que es inmortal, qual ellos inmortales,  
 Y en las cosas de guerra y preheminiencia  
 Tan insigne, tan fuerte y poderosa  
 Que si sus fuerzas no nos contrastaran  
 Fuera cosa muy facil el hazerse  
 De todo el mundo vniversal señora? (285)

When the aged Chumpo surrenders to Vicente de Saldivar we see that anguish and loss do not fall exclusively to the Acomans. The sergeant major requests the body of his brother, Juan de Zaldívar, whose death was the immediate cause of the war. Chumpo replies to the grieving Saldívar that his brother's body has been beaten to a pulp and burned along with the twelve other victims of the uprising. The Spaniards ask to see the place where Juan de Zaldívar fell:

Y en él tan gran manchón de sangre vimos  
 Que dos tendidas brazas ocupaba.  
 Vista por el sargento desdichado  
 La sangre del hermano ya difunto,  
 Aunque ya fría, elada y denegrada,  
 Sin ningún fuego comenzó a hervirle  
 En lo más hondo de su tierno pecho,  
 Y luego al mismo punto se le puso  
 Vn grosísimo ñudo atravesado,  
 A la pobre garganta bien assido,  
 Y los enjutos ojos combertidos  
 En dos mares sin fondo derramaban  
 Mil arroyos de lágrimas caudales,  
 Con que a doloroso y tierno llanto  
 A todos nos movía y lebantaba. (291)

In Canto XXXIII, on the battleground of Acoma, the warring parties confront their tragedy and dashed hopes as both victors and vanquished share a common, frail humanity. Nevertheless, the Spaniards' losses are limited. They know that their newly established settlement of San Juan de los Caballeros will carry forward its mission, consolidating their faith and victory over a determined enemy. For the Acomans, on the other hand, the destruction of their fortress and their honor can only bring servitude and death. The poet beholds defeated Acoma and the fires raging within, and if his verses can be called unimaginative, they nevertheless convey the vividness of direct experience and observation:

Las velas doi al viento, reboviendo  
 Al temeroso incendio, cuías llamas,  
 Vibrando poderoso y escupiendo  
 Vivas centellas, chispas y pavesas,  
 Las lebantadas casas abrasaban.  
 Notad, señor, aquí, los altos techos,  
 Paredes, aposentos y sobrados  
 Que abiertos por mil partes se desgajan  
 Y súbito a pedazos se derrumban,  
 Y cómo en vivo fuego y tierra entierran  
 Sus míseros vezinos, sin que cosa  
 Quede que no se abraze y se consuma.  
 Mirad, señor, también los muchos cuerpos  
 Que de las altas cumbres del gran muro,  
 Assí, en el duro suelo se detienen;  
 Los bárbaros y bárbaras que ardiendo  
 Están, con sus hijuelos lamentando  
 Su mísera desgracia y triste suerte. (294)

Of course, not all the Acomans committed suicide. As many as six hundred surrendered or were captured by the Spaniards. The final episode of the poem concerns Tempal and Cotumbo, two members of Zutacapán's party who are captured while trying to escape. The two ask for knives in order to kill themselves but this request is denied. They are finally given nooses and allowed to climb some nearby poplars where they will end their lives. Before leaping, they defiantly address the Spaniards who await their death:

Soldados, advertid que aquí colgados  
 Destos rollizos troncos os dexamos  
 Los miserables cuerpos por despojos  
 De la victoria illustre que alcanzastes  
 De aquellos desdichados que podridos  
 Están sobre su sangre rebolcados.  
 Sepúlcro que tomaron porque quiso  
 Assí fortuna infame perseguirnos  
 Con mano poderosa y acabarnos.  
 Gustosos quedaréis que ya cerramos  
 Las puertas al vivir y nos partimos  
 Y libres nuestras tierras os dexamos. . . .

The poem concludes as the two Acomans:

. . . assí, rabiosos, bravos, desembueltos,  
 Saltando en vago, juntos se arrojaron . . . (302)

The tragic ending dramatizes the irreconcilable enmity between the Spaniards and Native Americans, yet the middle ground between the warring cultures is today occupied by mestizos, whose future dominance is represented in the poem by the expedition's leader, don Juan de Oñate. In the context of the current controversies surrounding the Oñate expedition, New Mexicans may view the conflict that ends the poem as a feud between

two branches of their ancestral family. But must the descendants of those warriors continue to take sides in the ancient feud? Were not the differences resolved in the centuries of intermarriage and mixed bloodlines that began with the Oñates and other, less prominent, families? Apparently not. Chicanos, as children of Mexico, Spain, and the United States, may see themselves as heirs to this tragic history and literature because the lynchings of Tempal and Cotumbo and the destruction of Acoma and countless other pueblos and villages, continues to haunt four hundred years later, as does the fate of the *gachupin*, the Spaniard who lost his empire, and the mestizo don Juan de Oñate, who lost his honor, his fortune, and his governorship. Villagrà's poem will find a place in the future anniversaries of the Oñate expedition because it reminds us that through literature we can continue to confront and understand our tragic history.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>At least three new editions of the poem have appeared in the last ten years, beginning with Mercedes Junquera's Spanish edition of 1989, a bilingual edition by the University of New Mexico Press in 1992, and a reprint of the 1900 edition published by the National Institute of History and Anthropology in Mexico City, in 1993.

<sup>2</sup>Phil Jaramillo has suggested a three-part structure in his review of the Junquera edition in *Bilingual Review/Revista Bilingüe*, September-December 1992.

<sup>3</sup>Pedro Piñero Ramírez, "La épica hispanoamericana colonial" in *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana*, Vol. 1, *Época colonial*, 168. Piñero Ramírez goes so far as to classify these as pro-Indian or proto-Indigenist epics and he cites the influence of Bartolomé de las Casas's treatises in defense of the Indians as well as the Italian and Spanish medieval and Renaissance epics that feature favorable depictions of the Moorish enemy.

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