

# Gallantry and Sociability in the South of Europe: Shifting Gender Relationships and Representations

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## 1 Parallel Figures

“To the Most-Impotent Mohammed Ben Abdallah, ben Juzeph, Chief of the Black Eunuchs of the Seraglio of Fez.” Thus begins the dedication of the satirical *Colección de diferentes escritos relativos al cortejo* [Collection of Writings on Gallantry], a slim volume printed in Madrid in 1764 with a fake title page announcing it had been published in Cortejópolis by the Oficina de Lindo Monito (Charming Little Monkey’s Office).<sup>1</sup> These opening words are penned by a Moroccan traveller in Spain – some years before the posthumous publication of José de Cadalso’s *Cartas marruecas* [Moroccan Letters] (1789), written in the 1770s in the wake of the fictional travels typical of the age.

The dedication evokes the masculinity of eunuchs in the oriental harems that so fascinated European readers. Rousseau had used the seraglio as a metaphor in his *Lettre à M. d’Alembert sur les spectacles* [Letter to M. D’Alembert on Spectacles] (1758), which the author of the *Colección* paraphrases without revealing his source: “every Parisian lady gathers in her apartment a harem of men more feminine than she, who know how to pay all kinds of homage to beauty, save that of the heart of which it is worthy.” (Rousseau 1821, 136; Velázquez de Velasco 1764, 7, note 1) For Rousseau, the outcome for any man willing to play this game was a symbolic castration, a brutal image that attacks the very roots of gallantry understood as a formative discipline of aristocratic manhood. His outrage at a model of sociability in which nobles and men of letters bowed down to salon hostesses symbolizes a visceral rejection of the social and aesthetic authority wielded by aristocratic ladies in fashionable society in favour of women’s domesticity that would, over time, become the norm in France and the rest of Europe.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The genuine details appear in the colophon.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the *mondaine* model and its moment of crisis, see La Vopa (2017); for Italy, Betri and Bambilla (2004), Brambilla (2013).

This chapter analyses the figures of the Italian *cicisbeo* and Spanish *cortejo* or *chichisveo*<sup>3</sup> – male companions of married ladies – and the codes of gallantry to which they subscribed by investigating how their contemporaries viewed them in comparison to one another and in relation to the practices of other countries and the (imaginary) customs of the past. My aim is to shed light on the role played by gender models in the pull between cosmopolitan ideals and the symbolic construction of the nation, at a time when Enlightenment preoccupations shaped the discourse of national character, which was “everywhere a discourse of ‘virtues’ and ‘vices,’” but which defined the nature of later nationalisms in their own distinctive fashions (Patriarca 2005, 381).

Hiding behind a Moroccan alias, the author of the *Colección* was in fact Luis José Velázquez de Velasco, Marqués de Valdeflores (1722–72), known for his attendance of literary salons, involvement in political factions and erudite interest in his country’s history, with a particular focus on Arab antiquities. He was arrested in 1764 when the *Colección* was interpreted as a political satire, perhaps because his fictitious Chief Eunuch was seen as a disguised portrait of some leading figure at court, or because the work questioned the manhood of those who practised gallantry and linked the morality of love with the strength of the nation, suggesting that a corrupt country ran the risk of being conquered:

In all parts of the inhabited earth the passion of love sets the tone for all other passions; and it can truly be said that one who knows a country’s theory of love knows its entire system of customs and thus its strengths and its weaknesses ... When the customs of one People are better than those of another, the latter’s risk of subjugation increases. (1764, 4)

Comprising various short pieces, the *Colección* had a far-reaching impact in Spain and South America on a readership represented by its author as both extensive and select (“the most numerous and most distinguished of the People” [Velázquez de Velasco 1764, 6]).<sup>4</sup> Its fragmentary and polyphonic structure gives voice, among others, to the Moroccan traveller; a woman who defends her own sex by blaming men for courting their fellows for reasons of political ambition; Gerundio, a strict moralist; and Razonador, a worldly philosopher.

Like the Marqués de Valdeflores, many writers in Italy and Spain used the *cicisbeo* or *cortejo* to symbolize the corruption of contemporary manners, something

3 The same terms are used in the two languages for both practice and practitioner.

4 In 1770, the Inquisition of New Spain sent back to Madrid a manuscript copy of *Elementos del cortejo para el uso de las damas principiantes*, by Cayetano Sixto García, included in the *Colección* (Martín Gaité 1972, 214–6).

for which they held outsiders responsible – the pernicious influence of France in particular. Sometimes, however, a parallel was drawn between the two practices. In 1738 the *Diario de los literatos de España* [Literary Journal of Spain] likened them, voicing the thoughts of an imaginary observer from the North (“one sees *chichisveo* in Spain just as in Italy, and in Germany no right-thinking man will be unmoved by it but will regard it as an illicit activity” [285]), and noting that the neologism *cicisbeo* had been used in Italy, since the early eighteenth century, to refer to what had previously been designated by the Spanish term *galanteo* (292–3).

That connection between *cortejo* and *cicisbeo* was lost after the late eighteenth century. Unearthed in a famous study by Carmen Martín Gaité (1972), since translated into English, it continued to go unnoticed in Italy until recent years (Bizzocchi 2015, 20). This is in part due to the limited communication between two national historiographies which have upheld the “exceptional nature” of their respective histories; Italian historiography long reiterated the idea asserted by writers of the Risorgimento that *cicisbeo* was unique to the Italian lands (Patriarca 2013; Bizzocchi 2015). The similarities and differences between the two practices have not, therefore, been thoroughly investigated, nor has the role they played in the construction of northern European images of the South or in forms of self-representation. There are various reasons why an analysis along these lines is both relevant and necessary. Firstly, because of the close cultural and political relationships between Spain and Italy – as well as dynastic links (three Spanish queens were Italian born, and Charles III was Duke of Parma and King of Naples before being crowned King of Spain), there were many Italian artists and musicians at the Spanish court, longstanding connections between artistic and literary academies, numerous works were translated into Spanish from Italian, and the Jesuits expelled from the Hispanic monarchy were exiled to Italy. Secondly, because in both territories intellectuals constructed the image of their nation in a complex relationship – both reactive and symbiotic – with representations projected from outside. In the eighteenth century, an important symbolic gulf opened up between Northern and Southern Europe, with the southern, Catholic lands seen as backward-looking compared to the progressive Protestant North, Great Britain in particular (and, in a different way, France). Foreign observers contrasted the glories of the Roma Empire and the Renaissance with the alleged prostration of contemporary Italian culture, and Spain’s former political and military hegemony with its present decline. The Italian and Spanish thinkers who reacted to those images also thought in terms of national decadence, a notion that would profoundly influence the respective nationalisms of the nineteenth century.

As far as we can tell from literary and iconographic representations (Figure 1.1) and personal writings (memoirs and correspondence), *cicisbeo* was an institutionalized custom within the context of Italian family alliances and aristocratic

sociability, notably (but not only) in northern cities such as Genoa, Venice and Florence. It was an arrangement that allowed respectable ladies to participate in polite sociability (*conversazioni*, theatre and other entertainments) with a male companion, with their husbands' acquiescence (Bizzocchi 2014, 8). In the absence of personal testimony, Spanish sources are far more limited to the literary realm, although some prints might be interpreted as visual allusions to the *cortejo* (Figure 1. 2). Plays and satirical pamphlets circulated widely in both territories, some in translation, such as the comedies of Carlo Goldoni. Mixed sociability was also the subject of transnational debate for Catholic theologians in France, Portugal, Italy and Spain. Much to the outrage of authors such as Antonio Salvini, Costantino Roncaglia and Giuseppe Brocchi – suspicious that lust lay behind any encounter between the sexes (“in the heart of a young man or woman, the fire of intemperance is greater than that of Vesuvius or Etna”



FIGURE 1.1 Pietro Longhi, *The Visit*. 1746. Oil. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



FIGURE 1.2 Francisco de Goya, plate 27 from *Los Caprichos*: “¿Quién más rendido?” [Which of them is the more overcome?], 1799. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

[Roncaglia 1786, 52]) – other clerics, notably Jesuits, considered these practices compatible with Christian morality and sought to regulate them (Ossorio de la Cadena 1766, 68–9; *Diario* 1738, 293, 317, 327).

## 2 An Exchange of Gazes

Comparing the ways in which foreign travellers represented gender relationships in Spain and Italy with those in which Italian and Spanish writers

thought about both foreign practices and their own, offers some interesting perspectives on how differences and similarities were constructed through an exchange of gazes which affected how one imagined the other, how one represented one's own reflection in a foreign mirror, and whether the view from outside was rejected or imitated. All this in the context of tensions common in the eighteenth century but particularly intense for Italians and Spaniards: between cosmopolitan aspirations and the construction of a national identity; between rejecting external stereotypes and (sometimes unconsciously) identifying with them.

Protestant observers believed that by condemning any contact between men and women as sinful Catholicism was encouraging an unrestrained satiation of desires, and therefore generally presented Spanish *cortejo* and Italian *cicisbeo* as variations on a single immoral theme. One extreme case is that of Christoph Meiners (1747–1810), professor at Göttingen and a leading intellectual and political voice in the emergence of the Prussian State (Anderson and Benbow 2009). His *Geschichte des Weiblichen Geschlechts* (1788–1800), translated into English in 1808 (*History of the Female Sex*) and widely read, adapts the models of Scottish conjectural history, which takes the condition of women and relations between the sexes as indicators of civilization, to uphold his theory of Germanic superiority. It suggests the same ethnic determinism postulated by Meiners in other works on the superiority of Europeans over the “savages” of the Pacific by representing a Europe divided between the civilized North, epitomized by Germany, and the sensual South. Rather than basing his argument either on climate or on the usual cultural and political reasons (Catholicism and political despotism), he claims the differences in Spanish customs are due in great part to the influence of Moorish and Jewish blood, thus anticipating Romanticism's sexualisation and essentialization of national characteristics (IV, 276–77). According to Meiners, keeping the women of the South in seclusion had temporarily curbed natural urges but, since the end of the seventeenth century, French-influenced mixed sociability had degenerated into adultery and led to the corruption of the social fabric (IV, 333, 343).

Meiners' gaze is distant, both geographically and in terms of perspective. As an armchair traveller who relied on the accounts of others without comparing them to indigenous sources, and as a philosopher trying to prove a pre-established thesis, he rhetorically subsumes Italy, Spain and Portugal into a virtually homogeneous *South*, an example followed by the Romantic travellers (Andreu 2016; Moe 2002). His long-distance judgement contrasts with the vision of others more sensitive to nuance, more inclined to compare what they read with local testimony and to make an effort to understand the logic of other social practices; with that of Italian, Spanish or Creole observers which

challenges the ideas of external observers; and with that of women which qualifies certain aspects of those male opinions.

Scottish physician John Moore's *A View of Society and Manners in Italy* (1781), a work which enjoyed many reprints in Britain and North America and with which Meiners disagreed, is an example of the inquisitive gaze, in search of a balance "between distance and sympathy" (Brewer 2014). Moore rejects the sweeping definition of *cicisbeo* as a form of adultery common throughout Italian society for being based on imprecise and biased information (1781, II, letters LXXIX and LXXV; particularly 412–17). From his own observations and details sourced on the spot, he finds a political explanation for this brand of aristocratic sociability, to which he does not attribute any negative moral consequences: lacking freedom and active employment, Italian noblemen seek out the company of ladies, unlike their British counterparts, who involve themselves in Parliamentary activity or country pursuits and therefore do not benefit to the same extent from women's softening influence (II: 398–99).

There are echoes in Moore's work of the rebuttal aimed at Samuel Sharp (*Letters from Italy*, 1765–66) by the British-based but Turin-born Giovanni Baretto (1719–89), who attempted to translate the ways of his homeland – both linguistically and culturally – in various dictionaries (Spanish-English and English-Italian) and, especially, in *An Account of the Manners and Customs of Italy* (1768). Baretto refuted various Grand Tour stereotypes, including the association of *cicisbeo* with widespread adultery among women and a loss of virility among men. Writing from personal experience ("having myself been, in my bright days, both a *cicisbeo* and an humble imitator of Petrarch's poetry" [1769, 117]), he defines the social logic and territorial frontiers of the practice, denying that women of all classes from across Italy indulge in it ("when he [Sharp] says the Venetian Ladies, the Neapolitan Ladies, the Florentine Ladies, and, what is still worse, THE ITALIAN LADIES... he vomits slander" [92–3]). In his account of his travels in Spain in 1760, Baretto proves he has paid close attention to the conversations he has had with locals, notably a perhaps fictionalized female informant, Doña Paula, who defends the respectability of the "chichisveo" (later defined by Baretto in his Spanish-English dictionary as "a courteous gallant" [1778, unpaginated]), rejecting the malicious interpretations of outsiders:

"I have heard much, said she, of your Italian *Cicisbeo's*, and as far as I can judge, they are the same thing with what we call *Cortejo's* [sic]." "I will have the confidence to say of my townswomen of the better sort, that the greatest part live as they ought, *whatever notions foreigners may form* of our *Cortejo's*, and *whatever liberty they may take with us when they expatiate on the freedom in our manners.*" (1770, 61, 63; emphasis added)

The fact that Baretti relays her indignation about the ease with which travellers questioned the virtue of her fellow countrywomen shows his empathy with Spaniards, who were subject like Italians to distorted depictions, an empathy similar to that with which female British travellers such as Hester Thrale (Piozzi) or Lady Morgan changed the stereotypes of the Grand Tour to show their own sex in a more favourable light (Agorni 2002; Bizzocchi 2015; Brilli and Neri 2020). Perhaps because he was at the same time an Italian and an outsider himself in Spain, Baretti was the traveller who best captured the meaning of both *cortejo* and *cicisbeo* as an intrinsic part of aristocratic culture.

When it comes to Spanish travels in Italy, the manuscript account (1793) by dramatist Leandro Fernández de Moratín (1760–1828) is of particular interest. Very knowledgeable about Italian culture, he attempted to sum up sociologically the “national character” of each of the territories he visited (rather than generalising about the peninsula as a whole). However, his description agrees with some of the commonest assumptions of British and French travellers regarding southern sexual immorality (“any foreigner who familiarizes himself a little with Rome, instantly hears a multitude of curious and merry anecdotes on this matter”), painting a panorama of adulterous wives, tolerated by meek husbands and courted by “foppish, affected” *cicisbei* (Moratín 1991, 568). He concludes, echoing Grand Tour travellers: “Though Italian men are sometimes jealous, they have long ignored the effects of this terrible passion” (592). Similarly, he describes the decline of Italian culture in terms of effemination compared with the past: modern art has “a certain effeminate and puerile quality,” but bad taste goes even further in the literary realm, with female roles played by male actors in Rome and the opera house dominated by *castrati*, to whom he refers disparagingly as “eunuchs” (605–8). Moratín’s criticism is revealing in a writer who fought to establish a new national theatre, reforming the Baroque tradition with a neoclassical aesthetic and moral models of restrained masculinity and domestic femininity as seen in his play *El sí de las niñas* [The Maidens’ Consent] (1805).

We find a different perspective in the diaries of Creole Francisco de Miranda (1750–1816): that of a cosmopolitan and gregarious ladies’ man, who originally saw himself as a Spanish citizen but then claimed American identity in rebellion against the empire. Far from seeing *cicisbeo* or *cortejo* as an anomaly of the South, he labels with these terms various forms of gallantry, practised from Italy and Spain to Switzerland and the United States, thus including them in a shared culture of gallantry in which he himself participated (1978–81, I: 312, II: 15, 23–24, 44; III: 165, 420, 412; IV: 17, 99, 151, 152, 159, 169, 172, 180–81). He also displays a curiosity about local peculiarities presumably inspired by his reading matter (including numerous travel accounts and the Marqués de Valdeflores’



satirical *Colección*) and his own inquisitive personality. In Turin, “Mademoiselle Morel” tells him about “the matters of the Cicisveo, which I desired to know” (II: 169); in Venice, Isabella Teotochi Marin, Countess Albrizzi (1760–1838), explains to him that any widowed or married lady “must conform with the customs of the land” and “cannot decently present herself in public without being accompanied by a *cavaliere servente*” (I: 23–24). In Genoa, nobleman Benedetto Centurione talks to him about *cicisbeo* as a male rite of passage (IV: 159). From these conversations with educated locals, Miranda learns that the practice not only enables young noblemen to learn sophisticated manners but allows women to participate in society in respectable fashion and helps families keep their sons away from gaming houses and brothels; reversing the roles, he answers the questions of a Danish lady curious about Hispanic love customs (IV: 15, 314). He also points out territorial and social differences invisible to the superficial observer, such as the exclusivity of a freedom tolerated among the élite but censured for the lower classes (IV: 181). It is no coincidence that he reserves his most cutting comments for the French, describing ladies attending an opera as “intolerably simpering and affected” and the “*cicisveo* (or *ami de la maison*)” attending them as “so servile and insincere that anywhere else he would have been a laughing stock” (IV: 99), in language recalling the well-known *Viaggi di Enrico Wanton alle terre incognite australi ed ai regni delle Scimie* [The Travels of Henry Wanton to the Undiscovered Austral Regions and the Kingdom of the Apes] (1749, translated into Spanish in 1769) and its simian protagonists (Seriman 1769, 110–13). The Anglophile and pro-Republican Miranda thus returns the gaze of French travellers and uses this satirical image of French gallantry to represent his censure of the Ancien Régime.

### 3 Inadequate or Excessive Masculinity, Dissolute Femininity

One thing that emerges from debates between British or French travellers and Italian or Spanish writers is the idea that the outside gaze simplifies and distorts a custom of complex meanings. Is *cicisbeo* a socially exclusive and morally innocent code or a corrupting influence? Is gallantry a requirement of civilization or does it subvert the natural order of the sexes? For those attempting to understand and explain its logic, those practices are part of the realm of civility, which since the Renaissance had interpreted gallantry as a sign of aristocratic distinction. In female company, young noblemen could refine their mastery of word, gesture and the art of seduction, useful not only in their relations with women, but also in their dealings with their peers and male patrons. For their part, women could enjoy a certain amount of power

and freedom within the limits of fashionable culture. Baretti, with whose work both Miranda and Moore were familiar, places *cicisbeo* in that tradition and establishes for his British readers an intellectual genealogy reaching back to Neoplatonism in Italian Renaissance courts, according to which a courtier's love for his lady elevates him spiritually, enabling him to curb his instincts and perfect his manners: quite the opposite of emasculation, it is the art (long-lost in Britain) that makes a man a true man, or to be precise, a nobleman. In Spain, Eugenio Gerardo Lobo (1679–1750) hinted at those Platonic origins in his poem "Definition of the *chichisbeo*, written in obedience to a lady," which plays with the paradox of courtship as an elegant artifice characterized by ambiguity and erotic tension ("noble and respectable idea/of Plato," "pretty fiction," "treacherous truth" [1717, 145–46]). Himself an educated and worldly nobleman and soldier, described by his contemporaries as a "handsome youth," Lobo embodied the aristocratic code still very much alive in his day, which explains the prolonged success of his gallant poetry despite the disapproval of moralists (Haro de San Clemente 1729, 23).

Explicitly contradicting Lobo, a dictionary published in 1786 defined *chichisbear* as to compliment a woman "with flattery, words of love, deception" (Terreros y Pando 1786, I: 535 and 416). By this time, courtly forms of masculinity, femininity and sociability were being ridiculed through depictions of the vain and foolish *petimetra* and affected *petimetre* or *damerino*, a man who enjoyed female company. Years later, satirical leaflets and cartoons about the supposed adultery of Maria Luisa of Parma with the royal favourite Manuel Godoy and Charles IV's weakness as husband and monarch gave that relationship of dependence, affect and trust between the three, comparable to *cortejo*, a pornographic interpretation.<sup>5</sup> The new standards of female decorum, conjugal morality and political behaviour led one nobleman and diplomat to ridicule in his memoirs Godoy's willingness to receive female petitioners, a common practice in courtly politics and gallantry, by likening it to the harem, a symbol of role reversal which sees the women in charge, the favourite reduced to the role of eunuch (García de León Pizarro, 1894, 106, 149).

By the final decades of the century, there were many opposing voices to be heard across Europe and the Americas decrying mixed sociability and gallantry as foreign, effeminate practices, but the intensity and connotations of that symbolic link varied significantly. In Italy, outside observers, British travellers

5 Compare his portrait by Francisco Folch de Cardona as a dashing young man in military uniform (c.1788) to Goya's depiction of the older, bloated Godoy (1801); both paintings are housed in the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando. About contemporary satire, see Calvo Maturana (2013).

in particular, saw *cicisbeo* as the very embodiment of the inadequacy of Catholic gender models, as opposed to those of marital fidelity, female domesticity and restrained virility attributed to the Protestant world. In part reflecting that foreign gaze, Italian reformist discourse in turn clamoured against a loss of manhood among effeminate *cicisbei* and husbands who tolerated their wives' infidelity. Writers such as Ludovico Muratori (1672–1750), admired by educated Spaniards, or Vincenzo Martinelli (1702–1785) traced the origins of *cicisbeo* to the occupation of the Italian peninsula during the War of the Spanish Succession, when French soldiers seduced Genoese ladies, violating the social usages of gender separation, female fidelity and male honour, inherited from Spanish previous influence (Bizzocchi 2014, 18, 28). While this attribution is historically imprecise, the connection between a relaxation of marital morality and the decline of the proud city republics of the Renaissance, linked to successive foreign occupations thought to have destroyed Italian moral fibre, fixed itself in Enlightenment thinking. It lived on into the nationalist era, when there was an urgent focus on creating new models of austere male citizenship and virtuous femininity on which to build the nation (Bizzocchi 2014 and 2015, 16–17; Patriarca 2005).

In Spain, the motif of lost manhood also appears in both religious and secular writings. Witty images portray husbands powerless to impose their authority (“to the utmost affront of the male sex” [*Diario* 1738, 326]), and *cortejos* as weaklings who have exchanged real swords – noble privilege and phallic symbol – for ornamental dress swords (Haro de San Clemente 1729, 2–3; Ramírez y Góngora 1774, 35). “Because of you/I have denied my sex,” states a *cortejo*, the protagonist of one of Ramón de la Cruz’s (1731–1794) very popular short plays (1996, 233). In Spanish America, Creole writers who rejected the theories of European intellectuals (Cornelius de Pauw, Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, William Robertson) claiming that the New World was inferior because its natural conditions made men less virile and women immoral, blamed instead any male effeminacy on lenient upbringings (Alegre Henderson 2019) and the bad habits of any man who was “happier conversing in the drawing room than in a philosopher’s study” (*Mercurio Peruano* [Peruvian Mercury], 19 February 1792, IV, 121).

As in Italy, Spanish Enlightenment reformism called for regenerating the nation around the ideal of the domestic woman and the good citizen, husband and father, presented as an updated version of Spanish traditions, far removed from feminized foreign (i.e. French) customs. In implicit dialogue with Montesquieu’s stereotypical vision of Spain in letters 78 and 136 of his *Lettres persanes* [Persian letters], Cadalso embodies female and male ideals them in the virtuous characters of his *Cartas marruecas* (1774), the mirror image of the frivolous

protagonists of *Los eruditos a la violeta* [Men of Superficial Learning] (Ewalt 2015; Andreu 2016, 54–6). Concern about effemination does not, however, seem an especially accentuated feature of the Spanish Enlightenment, nor do I think that the Spanish *petimetre* caused any greater anxiety in this respect than did the French *petit-mâitre* or the British fop or “macaroni” (Haidt, 1998, 111–16). Comparatively speaking, inadequate manhood was a less recurrent theme in literature on gallantry and courtship than it was in Italy. More present for outsiders was the shadow of an archaic, aggressive virility, indebted to the “Black legend about Spanish brutality in America, reactivated in the eighteenth century by the rivalry between colonial powers. In 1788, British consul Alexander Jardine characterized the Spanish, unlike their Portuguese neighbours, not as victims of modern feminization but bound to the legacy of the conquistadors:

the Spaniard is ever the same proud, obstinate, lazy, but manly character ...; with a high sensibility, and a determined character, he may be led to be vindictive and cruel; with strong nerves, and a persevering mind, he may be fit for desperate enterprize and conquest. (I, 415–16)<sup>6</sup>

For some clerics, the traditional Spanish virtues of male virility and female seclusion had established an only recently breached barrier against licentious behaviour. The Carmelite author of *El chichisveo impugnado* [Denunciation of chichisveo] (1729; plagiarized by Salazar, 1737) claimed that once foreign ways had been introduced into a “Christian, honourable and zealous nation,” they had gravely harmed “its ancient splendour, honour, reputation and esteem” because the warmth of the South meant closeness between the sexes could simply not be as morally innocent as it was in the cold countries of the North (Haro de San Clemente 1729, 7–8). For his part, Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos (1744–1811), in his devastating critique of the nobility as responsible for Spain’s decline since the glory days of the Empire is less harsh on the *petimetre* or effeminate *cortejo* than he is on those nobles who appropriate the ways of lower-class *majos* and *majas*, characterized by the disorders of excessive virility (*Second Satire to Arnesto*, Jovellanos 1984, 335–38) and depraved, sensual femininity (*First Satire*, 220–25). Cadalso criticizes Don Juans with no regard for religion or morality and no respect for the opposite sex, metaphorically representing the libertine as “womankind’s Cortés” (Cadalso 2006, Letter X, 190), an ambiguous image that also betrays some admiration for the conquistador he extolled elsewhere in his work as a national hero (Letter IX).

6 On the conquistadors’ masculinity, see Molina (2011).

#### 4 Gallantry in the Mirror of Time

Reflecting on national customs involved comparing them with those of other places, but also with those of other times, resignifying the past in the process of national construction in a European context. Were the new codes of mixed sociability a sign of progress or decline? Was gallantry the same throughout civilized Europe or did it acquire different features depending on climate or politics? Were there ancient and modern forms and if so how did they differ? These interrelated debates were crucial to the ways in which Enlightenment thinkers represented Europe compared to “primitive” or “despotic” societies, reflected on the advantages and dangers of civilization and exchanged gazes about the role in its progress they attributed to their respective countries. While many French travellers and writers flew the flag for *politesse* and *mixité*, the English and Scots exalted a model of female modesty, masculine restraint and separation of the sexes. Though under-emphasized, this discussion was also important when it came to defining the place assigned to Southern Europe and the ways in which Italians and Spaniards interpreted their own history as reflected in the European mirror.

The present circumstances of both Italy and Spain were seen in terms of a decline from different but equally renowned glorious pasts. British writers and artists in particular were wont to symbolize in their images of ruined landscapes the distance between the peaks of the Roman Empire and Italian Renaissance and the current degeneracy of the Italians (Luzzi 2002), epitomized by their sexual immorality. By contrast, the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Hispanic hegemony had left a more ambiguous legacy of admiration and fear which explains the endurance in the European imagination of the motifs of female seclusion and male jealousy, recurrent themes in Spanish Baroque plays and novels. Even the satirical *Don Quixote*, successfully translated into English and French, was read literally, as proof that the old-fashioned worship of ladies was very much alive; the anonymous French writer M\*\*\* wrote in 1756 that a lover who has spent the night serenading his beloved, “consoles himself with the pleasure he experienced on touching the bricks of the house of his incomparable Dulcinea” (García Mercadal 1972, 487). Many travellers portrayed a country attached to the amorous customs of the past (“love here is an arduous task”), its women either enslaved to tyrannical husbands or potential adulteresses restrained by close vigilance (García Mercadal 1972, 275, 487). Casanova’s memoirs of his erotic adventures in Spain in 1768 revolve around the idea, typical of Enlightenment and libertine thinking, that mysticism and sensuality were connected and repression stimulated desire (“Gallantry is sober and uneasy in that country, for it has as its object pleasures absolutely

forbidden there"; Casanova 1993, III: 572), while the Baron de Bourgoing, influenced by Montesquieu, emphasises the crucial influence "of a climate that communicates its heat to the senses and imagination" (Bourgoing 1797, II: 307). Others, however, declare that such customs have fallen into disuse: "All that has been said about the precautions of *jalousie* employed by husbands to guard their wives is no longer pertinent. The only *jalousie* visible here today is the kind used to screen a window," wrote Father Norberto Caimo of Lombardy in his *Lettere di un vago italiano ad un suo amico* [Letters to a Friend from an Italian Traveller], published anonymously between 1759 and 1767 and successfully translated into French (García Mercadal 1972, 418). His judgement was endorsed, among others, by British writers Edward Clarke (1763, 1v), William Dalrymple (1777, 45) and Joseph Townsend (1792, 244–7).

The images are complex and the nuances revealing, for diagnosing the state of amorous customs is the equivalent of situating the country visited – as well as one's own – in a hierarchy of progress. In the eighteenth century it was understood that forms of love had a geography that was also a living history: the prevailing instinct among "savages" was to achieve carnal union with any member of the opposite sex; this had been gradually refined into the spiritual attraction which Europe saw as one of the keys to its superiority (O'Brien 2009: 112, 143). For Montesquieu, the idea that men should respect women rather than imposing themselves by force stems from courtly societies; other Frenchmen, such as Jean-Baptiste La Curne de Saint-Palaye, would attempt to prove that the medieval courts of Provence were the birthplace of the concept then beginning to be known as *amour courtois*. While David Hume, commenting on Montesquieu, justified gallantry as natural benevolence, Rousseau and civic republicanism abhorred it as an unnatural and hypocritical code, advocating in its place a political and moral ideal whose cornerstone was female domesticity and modesty (La Vopa 2017). In England and Scotland, interest in medieval chivalry developed in the late eighteenth century for different reasons: from an aesthetic fascination with the Gothic as an alternative to neoclassical taste, to the political search for the historical roots of the British constitution. As an ideal that implied a strong emphasis on Christianity and protection of women, the Christian knight offered a solid base on which to ground national British masculinity combining virtue, virility and refinement, in opposition to the polite gentleman, perceived as foreign and effeminated (Cohen 2005; O'Brien 2009).

Those northern European writings on civilized love tend to assimilate courtship in Southern Europe with an old-fashioned gallantry based on gender separation, associated not so much with the legacy of the Moors (as would be the case in the nineteenth century) as with medieval chivalry, and to regard

modern gallantry in mixed spaces as typical of France. While they agreed that changes in manners had affected the entire continent by this time, there were different views on their reach. In his criticism of southern immorality, Meiners writes of Portugal as still keeping women in seclusion, whereas Italy and Spain, influenced by France, have been thrust from segregated spaces to the licentiousness of *cicisbeo* or *cortejo*: “The Spaniards and Italians, from distrust of the virtue of their wives, confined them like slaves till the commencement of the eighteenth century; and [...] at the present day they allow them unbridled liberty” (Meiners 1808, IV: 314–5). For William Alexander, it is the Spanish knight errant who symbolizes a bygone past within a more advanced Europe, that of a medieval chivalry which was by then was regarded with ambivalence (“The Spaniard goes a step further, the whole sex is for him an object of little less than adoration; he retains still a tincture of the spirit of knight-errantry” [1779, 209]), while in both Italy and France civility and indiscriminate liberty now reign. Both writers agree that female sexual virtue and domesticity are crucial to the moral superiority of Germany and Britain respectively, compared to the old southern gallantry and its modern French version.

In French *mondaine* society, worshipping from afar and segregation of the sexes were not seen as worthy of the name gallantry because, once any external barriers had been overcome, Spanish lovers had no inner restraints such as modesty with which to refine their courtship. In the early eighteenth century, the Marquise de Lambert (like Montesquieu) therefore reserved the term for the “delicate art of love” which for her had reached its peak only in “the French nation” and by her own time had been lost (1781, 183). Decades later, by contrast, Antoine-Léonard Thomas’s *Essai sur les mœurs, l’esprit et le caractère des femmes* [Essay on the Manners, Genius and Character of Women] (1772), translated into Spanish, English and Portuguese and widely disseminated, claimed that French gallantry had begun with the Spanish-born queen and regent Anne of Austria, who introduced to court “some of the customs of her homeland, to wit a mixture of gallantry and majesty, of sensibility or gentleness of heart and circumspection, in other words, a relic of the ancient and brilliant gallantry of the Moors married to the graceful pomp and majesty of the Castilians” (1773, 173–74). Thomas presents Spanish gallantry as a cross between Castilian discretion and oriental sensuality (understood as a sophisticated art, not crude desire), compared to which dealings between the sexes in France are “a cold and artificial custom [...] which is not love, or passion, or even gallantry” (1773, 203). His tone, far removed from the Marquise de Lambert’s pride in women’s moral and cultural authority, reveals the doubts of a man of letters torn between loyalty to that worldly tradition and Rousseau’s moralistic, anti-aristocratic and misogynous rejection of it.

The complexity of representations of gallantry can be seen in *La Conversation* [The Conversation] by Carle Van Loo (1705–65), brother of Louis-Michel Van Loo – court painter to Philip v. Exhibited at the Salon of 1755, the oil painting was sold in 1772 to Catherine II and is now housed in St Petersburg's Hermitage Museum (there are other versions as drawings -fig. 1.3- and engravings). It was commissioned by Mme de Geoffrin (1699–1777), hostess of the most famous literary salon in Paris, as a companion piece to another work entitled *La Lecture* [The Reading], with a request that they should both have a Spanish theme, in the tradition of aristocratic and courtly Hispanophilia. Van Loo's *Conversation* portrays a gentleman dressed in seventeenth-century



FIGURE 1.3 Carle (Charles André) Van Loo. *La conversation espagnole*. 1754. Drawing. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



style paying court to a lady in an unsegregated setting. Emma Baker (2007) has interpreted this scene as a self-portrait of French salon society in the latter half of the eighteenth century whose nostalgic vision of former Spanish splendour would project the idea of gallantry as a fragile treasure under threat from Rousseauian criticism. But what can also be seen here, as in the essay by Thomas (a member of Mme de Geoffrin's salon), is the ambivalence with which French intellectuals portrayed Spanish culture (as both alien and familiar, anchored in the past and modern) and against which eighteenth-century Spaniards had to measure themselves.

It is entirely understandable that enlightened Italian and Spanish thinkers would reject the idea that amorous customs were any less moral or civilized in their countries than in those laying claim to a higher rung on the ladder of progress. For Baretti, as we have seen, respectful gallantry, rooted in medieval chivalry and neoplatonic philosophy, was key to the superiority and modernity of Italy – and, by inference, Spain – far preferable to French frivolity or the boorish habits induced by gender segregation in Britain (Baretti 1769, 101–113). In his *Lettere piacevoli* [Pleasing Letters] (1791), Giuseppe Compagnoni upheld gallantry as “one of the strongest of social bonds,” fostering harmony among families and citizens (as quoted in Bizzocchi 2014, 17).

As for Jovellanos, who adopted Hume's belief that it was a civilizing force, he imagined in 1804 combining the “manly and brave gallantry of our knights of old” with the “ideas of a more educated and enlightened century” in the upbringing of the Spanish nobility, seeking to find that ever difficult balance between virility and civility, national tradition and a sophisticated openness to the wider world (2009, 217–18). Cadalso evoked a bygone Spain in which, in the words of a lady, “women, a little more restricted in their dealings, were held in greater esteem; old men and boys looked at us with respect; now they look at us with contempt” (2006, 189). He was not suggesting a return to the past, since Cadalso, like Jovellanos, understood that a modern society demanded a certain level of mixing between men and women, but the way in which both men idealize the chivalric spirit points to their ambivalence about new forms of sociability and the public presence of women. Other contemporaries expressed this uncertainty using ironic inversion as, for example, Manuel Antonio Ramírez y Góngora does in *Óptica del cortejo* [Optics of the *cortejo*] (1774), a dream allegory in which the protagonist, observing the gallant practices of his contemporaries through an optical instrument, listens to a maiden praising the freedom enjoyed by modern women:

“Our Spanish Ladies of bygone days [...] lived shut away in seclusion; [...] and lived without education, without freedom, without enjoyment, but with fear and timidity, purely because men esteemed them for their good

sense and venerated them for their prudence.” “[...] Now we may truly say that we are living, because a life spent in captivity is no life at all.” (1774, 6)

The male personification of Understanding contradicts her, asserting that *cortejo* in fact undermines the dignity of the rational man (Ramírez y Góngora 1774, 12, 50–51). Inés Joyes and Josefa Amar, two female writers who towards the end of the century denounced gender inequality, were critical of the past but, unlike the maiden in *Óptica del cortejo*, far from complacent about the present. Like their contemporaries they too reject “this spirit which, under the names of chichisveo, cortejo, etc., has gradually insinuated itself into society, plaguing it and destroying the peace of families” (Joyes, 1798, 286), but unlike Cadalso and Jovellanos they do not idealize the old chivalric veneration. “Did the much-praised modesty and seclusion of women in the past free them from assaults by men?” asks Amar. “When have murder, assassination, violence and abduction been more frequent than when women were shut away behind lock and key?” (1786, 422). In her opinion (not so distant from British republicans Mary Wollstonecraft and Catherine Macaulay) the violence of less civilized times has been replaced by the subtle forms of deception, self-deception and dependence that characterize modern gallantry – a practice that sees men worshipping women generically, without respecting them as individuals, and compromising the reputation demanded only of the female sex.

## 5 Conclusion

The similarities and differences in the ways travellers to Italy and Spain and Italian and Spanish thinkers reflected on amorous relations reveal close cultural links, but also subtly different ways of representing and gendering national stereotypes. Northern observers often lumped the two territories together as a single South, marked by the moral weaknesses of Catholicism – blamed for repressing human passions rather than teaching self-control and therefore failing to ensure effective resistance against modern licentiousness. Such clichés both infuriated and influenced enlightened Spanish and Italian thinkers who, while often happy to use those images as ammunition against one another, were equally vocal in contesting preconceived ideas about their own homeland. They represented new ways of behaving with the opposite sex as foreign novelties, within narratives that lamented decline from past splendour and exhorted the moral rearmament of the nation. At the same time, some writers advocated the cultivation of home-grown forms of decorous gallantry that offered an alternative to both the rougher habits of the past and excessive French-style civility.

There were, however, significant differences, largely connected to the two territories' different political traditions and positions on the international map. Italian Enlightenment reformism – and, more obviously, nineteenth-century nationalism – tended to link *cicisbeo* with the city-states' loss of autonomy resulting from the hegemony of France and Spain (who had been fighting one another on Italian soil since the fifteenth century), comparing the conquest – military or cultural – to a genuine emasculation. Spain itself escaped invasion in the early modern era, instead building its own empire. External images of the country harked back – as to a degree did the national ideal of enlightened patriotism – to clichés dating from the zenith of Spanish power, those of proud conquistadors and women kept behind closed doors: a mythical bygone age or, for those condemning the nation's backwardness, a burdensome past. As the new century dawned, there emerged the Romantic image of Spain which modified that legacy to build long-lasting stereotypes of excessive, dangerous masculinity and seductive, sensual femininity.

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