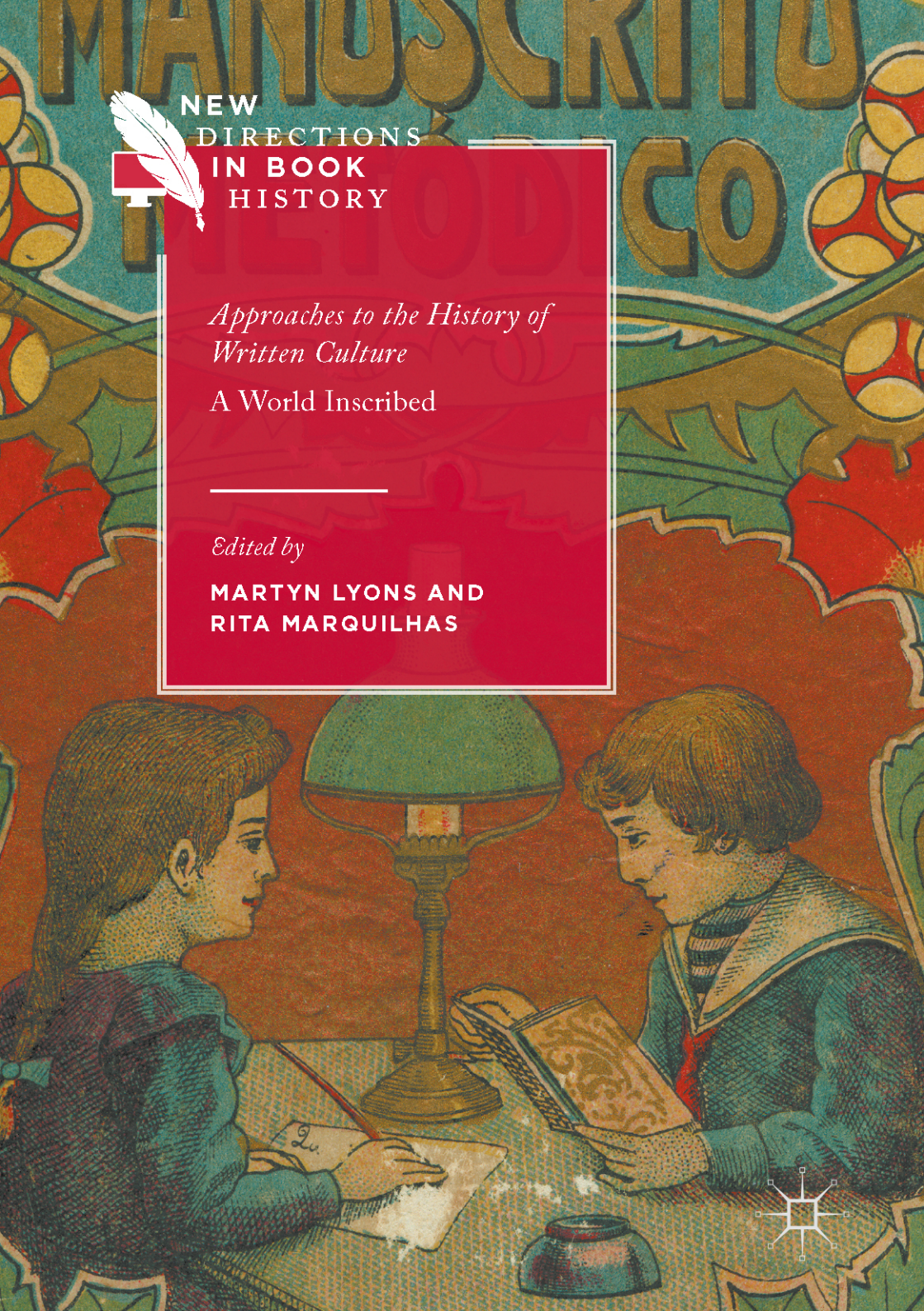

NEW DIRECTIONS IN BOOK HISTORY

Approaches to the History of Written Culture

A World Inscribed

Edited by

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Approaches to the History of Written Culture

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Contents

List of Figures

CHAPTER 5

Writings on the Streets: Ephemeral Texts and Public Space in the Early Modern Hispanic World

Antonio Castillo Gómez

Introduction

In July 1588, a humble Portuguese cobbler named João Vicente, a converted Jew born in Campomaior, decided to emigrate with his family to Brazil. He was inspired by the incentives offered by the Crown, which he learned about from a notice he came across in the streets of Lisbon, where he had arrived with the original intention of embarking for Cape Verde or Angola.[1] After arriving in All Saints' Bay (Salvador de Bahía), where he stayed for three years, he took ship for Buenos Aires, and from there he crossed Argentina to Potosí, in present-day Bolivia. There, in 1601, he was indicted by the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Lima. After more than 10 years of trials, he was pardoned, re-admitted to the Catholic Church and released in June 1612, but forced to wear the penitent's robe (*sanbenito*). In 1622, a royal official arbitrarily arrested him and deported him to Panama. From there he was sent to Cartagena de Indias (in present-day Colombia). Once again, he fell foul of the

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Inquisition, which accused him of relapsing into Judaism and condemned him to be burned at the stake in 1626.[2]

Considering all the tragic vicissitudes of Vicente's peripatetic life, the fact that it all started with a notice in the streets of Lisbon seems a minor detail. The detail is important, however, for the aims of this chapter. It can be understood as a clue, in Carlo Ginzburg's sense of the word – that is, as a sign through which we can perceive other matters of greater substance.[3] From this angle, the evidence of the notice and the effect it had on the Portuguese cobbler take us beyond the details of his case, to glimpse the different uses, materialities and meanings of writings in the city, in particular those disseminated through temporary display in a public place. Although the phrase 'public writing' tends to be associated with epigraphs and inscriptions on monuments, Armando Petrucci gave it a broader definition, describing it as

> any type of writing conceived for use in open spaces, or even in closed spaces, to allow multiple readings (by a group or a crowd) of a written text on an exposed surface at a distance.[4]

Among the different kinds of writing we can classify as public, I focus here on a series of ephemeral sheets, whose contents alternate between two poles: on the one hand, they are writings of information and propaganda, those fundamental aims of the writings of power, among which we can include edicts, decrees and posters announcing festivities; on the other, there are writings which challenge the dominant political, religious and moral system in the territories of the Spanish monarchy in the early modern period, and this was the primary purpose of defamatory libels and lampoons or pasquinades (*pasquines*).

There are many studies of the latter and fewer of the former, but only seldom have they been juxtaposed with each other in order to analyse their specific social and political roles. Putting them side by side enables us to examine the contrasts between these two types of text, some produced legally and others illegally, illustrating one facet of the dialectic between power and freedom in the history of scribal culture.[5] The first category of writings originates in the ability of powerful institutions, ranging from the Crown down to the municipalities, to use public space as an instrument for their publicity and propaganda purposes. The second group, in contrast, springs from a transgressive impulse which entails subverting government authority wielded over public space, as expressed in the nature of the messages and the attitude of graphic rebellion adopted by their authors.

Both categories, nevertheless, share the same spaces and modes of publication, and both edicts and libels were publicly disseminated with the aims of influencing power relations, encouraging ideological or moral cohesion, pursuing political struggles and social conflicts or encouraging harmony among the population. They normally targeted a wide and undifferentiated readership, by combining different communication technologies: writing, orality and sometimes visual culture as well. Lastly, although previous studies have privileged printed productions, it is important to realise that both edicts and libels were disseminated in handwritten copies as well as in printed form, in unequal quantities of course, as this chapter will show. We need to understand the written culture of any period in its entirety, independently of its material support or the physical layout of the page, especially when the different functions of such texts are quite comparable.

This assortment of texts enables us to capture different moments of life in the early modern city, seen as a privileged space for written communication.[6] Brian Richardson and others have examined Italy from a similar perspective; here I explore Hispanic cities in the same period.[7]

Information and Propaganda

As already mentioned, one of the most typical forms of ephemeral urban writings was legal and administrative documents issued by the established authorities. When Sebastián de Covarrubias, the lexicographer of Spain's Golden Age, defined decrees, he accurately listed the characteristics, function and mode of publication of such texts:

> They are commonly letters posted in public areas, giving notice of something, so that all may know of it and understand it and for the information of interested parties and those obliged to respond to such edicts.[8]

Although he only mentions the exhibition of the document, this was always preceded by a verbal proclamation, of the whole text or an extract, as the circumstances demanded. The public reading could not proceed in just any fashion, because it amounted to a political act, and the public crier was warned to perform it 'in a loud voice, slowly and with good enunciation'.[9] These requirements aimed at better communication, of course, but so too did the role assigned to those who mediated between the authorities and the people. At the sound of a trumpet blast, the crier, just like

the priest in other ceremonies, acted as an intermediary between the institution and the targeted public. His performance and behaviour were subject to rules and rituals governing his actions, as well as the appropriate musical accompaniment and in a few cases they even prescribed who should be present, as we see, for instance, in the following fragment from Burgos in February 1521, concerning the publication of the Edict of Worms of 17 December 1520, in which the Emperor Charles condemned the popular uprising:

> In the city of Burgos, on the sixteenth day of the month of February in the year 1521, this notice was read and proclaimed, with trumpets and the beating of the drums, from a covered wooden platform and royal dais (*cadahalso*) in the principal square of the city, in the presence of the gentlemen in the highest council of their Highnesses and the magistrates of their Household and Court, and below the said stage stood many knights and people who heard it and saw it. The said notice was proclaimed in its entirety, in the presence of all those aforementioned, posted on the said royal dais and stage, fixed to the cloth in which they were covered until nightfall, with two drummers who remained with it.[10]

Clearly, every act of proclamation was not vested with the same degree of solemnity; that depended on the importance of the institution responsible and of the contents. An edict issuing from a municipality or a corporation was not treated in the same way as a royal or inquisitorial decree or a papal bull, which would normally be proclaimed with great solemnity and respect. At the same time, the ritual was subject to many regulations, and altering any of them could incur corresponding warnings and sanctions. This is what emerges, for example, in a letter written on 24 March 1627 by Antonio Morga, president of the Audiencia of Quito, to the Council of the Indes, complaining about the attitude of the city authorities who had neglected to accompany the representative of the Holy Office on the day an edict of anathema was pronounced.[11]

The combination of verbal proclamation and the written document implied three modes of reception. Firstly, it would be read aloud in church or some other public space by a scribe, priest or crier. Secondly, it provided for the individual or delegated reading of the text posted in the usual places, normally at the gates of the city or in churches or government buildings, as well as on the walls in the busiest squares and streets.[12]

Thirdly, there was the subsequent, more relaxed reading of a printed edition, possibly by experts and officials involved, especially in the case of edicts, decrees and orders printed in brochures.[13] The oral *performance* of the act took on great importance in a public proclamation, as we can also see in the distinctive prose of these texts, which draws on turns of phrase suitable for verbal communication.

In many cases in the late Middle Ages publication depended entirely on verbal proclamation, but the great innovation of the early modern period was the public exhibition of the document for a specified period, even if precedents for this did exist.[14] Texts destined for temporary exhibition in 'public places' were copied or printed on large-format paper. Even when printed versions were an advantage, notably when texts needed to be diffused in various locations of the same city or in different cities, in some situations they would still be drafted by hand.[15] This is what happened in the 1530s and 1540s, when the rector and councillors of the Colegio Mayor de San Ildefonso in Alcalá de Henares issued declarations on matters like the provision of canonries and prebendaries, or details of the university's property leases.[16] In the same fashion, Hugo de Velasco, vicar-general of the bishopric of Cuenca, ordered the implementation of the agreements of the Council of Trent (Fig. 5.1).[17] We can find many more examples from later periods, particularly concerning edicts about individuals, such as those sent in May 1651 to the Council of Orders to search for one Juan Hurtado de Mendoza, friar of the Order of Alcántara, who had escaped from imprisonment at the Court in Madrid.[18] The choice of writing technology depended on the importance and the scope of the edict.

This kind of text had some essential elements, including their very similar tone. Normally they began with the name of the issuing authority or institution, or else they might open with an allusion to verbal proclamation: 'Now listen all that this is published and made known on behalf of (…)' a phrase used by Don García de Toledo, Viceroy of Catalonia, to ban the entry into the Principality of potentially plague-infected people arriving from France or Valencia;[19] or 'Hear ye, let it be known (*tengan todos por públicos*)', used in Mexico City in 1647 in an act of excommunication against Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, bishop of Puebla de los Ángeles, and his vicar.[20] Then followed the explanation or *expositio* in legal terms, and the relevant order (*dispositio*), to conclude with the details of implementation, the date and validating signatures. Where appropriate, the verso was used to keep a record of public readings of the document

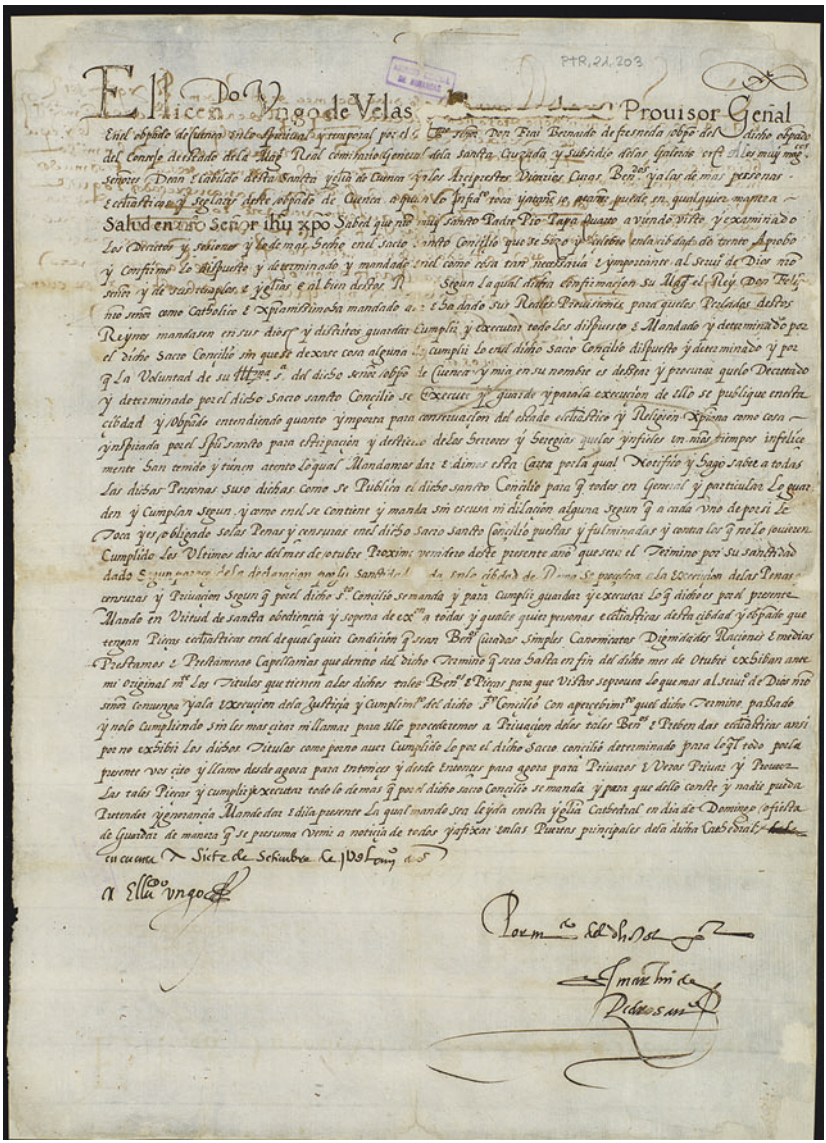
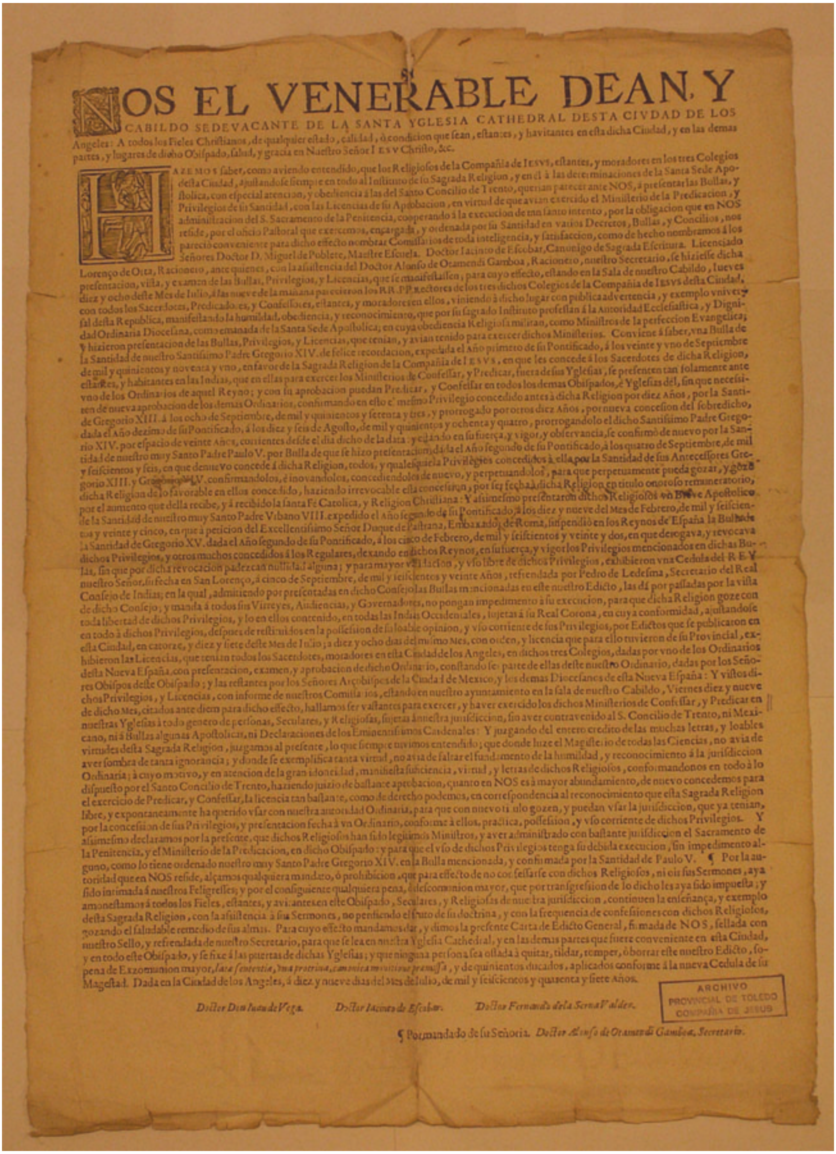


Fig. 5.1 Manuscript edict from Hugo de Velasco, *provisor general* of the Bishop of Cuenca, ordering the implementation of the decisions of the Council of Trent, 7 September 1564.
(Valladolid, Archivo General de Simancas, Patronato Real, leg. 21, doc. 203.)

along with a note on where it had been posted, whenever this had been stipulated. Sometimes the document enjoyed more permanent validity, as happened with inquisitorial edicts when questions of faith were on trial. Thus, an edict was promulgated by the Holy Office of Mexico on 30 April 1620, ordering the confiscation of two books: *Vida y virtudes del venerable varón Francisco de ϒepes* (Life and virtues of the venerable bachelor Francis of Yepes), written by the Carmelite friar José de Velasco and published in Valladolid in 1616, and *El solitario contemplativo y guía espiritual, sacada de diversos santos y padres espirituales* (Solitary meditation and spiritual guide, excerpted from various saints and spiritual fathers), written by friar Jorge de San José and published in Lisbon on 1617. This edict was given at least eight public readings between May and August of that year, according to the series of annotations on the back of the document.[21]

Printed decrees inherited the same diplomatic structure of manuscript versions, to use the technical bibliographical term. Some even included handwritten signatures to reinforce the legal validity and originality of each decree, although in the long run mechanical production would prove more practical. Print brought clear benefits to the textual and typographic arrangement of the edicts, and this was especially apparent from the end of the sixteenth century onwards. Typographic space was better organised, with the use of capital letters or large characters at the beginning of the text and at the beginning of other important sections; the use of rounded or italic characters to improve legibility; and the incorporation of emblems and iconographic motifs into the heading, which emphasised its role as an expression of power. This was particularly clear in edicts promulgated by the Papal Curia and other ecclesiastical bodies (Fig. 5.2).

The advantages of typographical composition were even more marked in posters made for the literary competitions which formed part of public festivals organised for various reasons by municipal councils, cathedral chapters, religious orders, universities, guilds and even a few individuals. The occasion might be a royal proclamation, the visit to the city by a member of the royal family, funeral arrangements for a local celebrity, the appointment of a resident to perform a certain duty, a welcome offered to some church authority, a canonisation or the translation of some holy relics. The content of the document varied according to the purpose of each celebration, but in general the fiesta was seen as a propaganda tool designed to enhance, firstly, the legitimacy of the monarchy and the church, and secondly, the merit and dignity of the organising institutions and groups.[22]


NOS EL VENERABLE DEAN, Y CABILDO SEDEVACANTE DE LA SANTA YGLESIA CATHEDRAL DESTA CIVDAD DE LOS Angeles: A todos los Fieles Christianos, de qualquier estado, calidad, ò condicion que sean, estantes, y havitantes en esta dicha Ciudad, y en las demas partes, y lugares de dicho Obispado, salud, y gracia en Nuestro Señor IESV Christo, &c.

HAZEMOS saber, como aviendo entendido, que los Religiosos de la Compañia de IESVS, estantes, y moradores en los tres Colegios desta Ciudad, ajustandose siempre en todo al Instituto de su Sagrada Religion, y en el à las determinaciones de la Santa Sede Apostolica, con especial atencion, y obediencia à las del Santo Concilio de Trento, querian parecer ante NOS, à presentar las Bullas, y Privilegios de su Santidad, con las Licencias de su Aprobacion, en virtud de que avian exercido el Ministerio de la Predicacion, y administracion del S. Sacramento de la Penitencia, cooperando à la execucion de tan santo intento, por la obligacion que en NOS reside, por el oficio Pastoral que exercemos, encargada, y ordenada por su Santidad en varios Decretos, Bullas, y Concilios, nos ...

Fig. 5.2 Edict of the dean and chapter of the cathedral of Puebla recognising the Jesuit Order's licence to confess and preach in the diocese, Puebla, 19 July 1647. (Archivo de España de la Compañía de Jesús en Alcalá de Henares (AESI-A), fondo Alcalá, caja 90, exp. 44.)

As usual with such edicts and ceremonies, the literary contest was first announced orally, and afterwards the poster was attached to the customary sites throughout the city. First of all the introduction would explain the theme of the festival, and then the content, language and metre required for poetic compositions, concluding with final information about the judges, the details of how to enter and the deadline. One example of such a poster was published in Zaragoza in 1619 on the occasion of a tribute paid by the city to friar Luis de Aliaga, following his appointment as Inquisitor-General (Fig. 5.3).[23] The archbishop's shield at the top announced the propaganda function of the document. The preface did the same, underlining the links between the city and the Dominican friar, before moving on to enumerate the new rules governing the selection of the poems. The poems were conceived as means to legitimise the Inquisition and recognise the contribution of the Crown of Aragon to its modern role in the person of King Ferdinand, in order to silence anyone inclined to give credit to Queen Isabella of Castile. They emphasised the new Inquisitor's membership of the Dominican order, underlying that order's role in the creation of the Holy Office. Other compositions praised the merits and virtues of Aliaga himself, and expressed the city's joy at his appointment. He was in fact the prior of the convent of Santo Domingo.

Examining their publication protocols will not suffice to interpret fully the role played by edicts, decrees or festival posters. The care taken in organising their layout, in both manuscript and especially in printed documents, clearly shows that their significance was symbolic and political rather than administrative and judicial.[24] The political and religious authorities used public dissemination by oral or written means to propagate the principles which upheld the social, political and religious order of the Catholic monarchy. If we think of them in this one-dimensional light, however, we will have only a partial appreciation of their functions. Every norm contains the possibility that it might be weakened, perhaps disobeyed or even violated. Various judicial prosecutions reveal the failure to comply with orders issued in the edicts, like the one brought in September 1559 by the Council of the Supreme Inquisition, to identify those people who 'had removed and taken down from the said Church' an edict on prohibited books which should have been exhibited on the door of Cori cathedral (Cáceres) for 30 days.[25] Another prosecution was opened in March 1614 against Martín Nuñoz, vicar of the archbishopric of Albarracín, to discover whether he had in fact ordered that no reading

Fig. 5.3 Poster announcing a poetry competition organised by the city and university of Zaragoza as a tribute to the Inquisitor-General, Friar Luis de Aliaga, Zaragoza, 1619.
(Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España. Ms. 9592, f. 7.)

or posting of any edict of this type would be tolerated in the church of that city.[26] Elsewhere, traces of rebellion appeared on the documents themselves, as happened in September 1597 with some residents of Colima (Mexico), who attacked the university graduate Sebastián de Valderrama, who had just been appointed priest and vicar of the town. They stigmatised him as 'the greatest of villains, mad, drunk and a thief, who collects what he is not owed', and wrote these insults at the foot of a bill of excommunication, signed by him, which had been posted on the church door.[27]

Signs of Protest

This last piece of evidence brings us to the exercise of freedom mentioned in my introduction. Urban space was also a site of textual confrontation, and the writings which best expressed transgression in all senses of the word – in their messages, space and graphic organisation – were undoubtedly defamatory libels and pasquinades. Here I leave aside those writings of protest which did not emerge in isolated incidents, but which appeared over much longer periods and expressed the political, social and religious conflicts which troubled the Spanish monarchy throughout the early modern period. A substantial part of the propaganda distributed took the form of printed pamphlets and they gave rise to genuine 'writing wars', with consequent effects on public opinion, as happened during the Catalan and Portuguese revolts against Philip IV, and the power struggles between rival court factions during the minority of Carlos II.[28]

Just as in the previous section, we may start with the definition given by Covarrubias in his dictionary, where he makes no distinction between libel and pasquinade. The libel, he says, refers to 'defamatory writings which are published anonymously and posted on pillars and corners of public places or disseminated through streets and public places'. He added that the adjective 'famoso', or infamous, was usually applied to them, 'associating them with infamy and dishonour'. As for the *pasquin* or pasquinade, he noted that the word refers to the well-known Roman statue of the minstrel Pasquino, to which people used to attach 'defamatory libels, from which we get the term pasquinade for such libels'. He goes on to say that they are usually 'prejudicious to individuals and those who govern and administer justice'.[29] In fact the name descends from Roman students' custom of using the statue to display their burlesque creations, prepared for St Mark's Day, which helped to make the pasquinade synonymous with

satirical poetry, and this also applied to infamous libels.[30] Perhaps it can be said that pasquinades and satires were texts critical of the authorities as well as of the dominant ideology and morality; while libels, often described as infamous or defamatory, were much more often personal insults directed at individuals whose honour and reputation were in question. So when, in 1621, the lawyer Francisco de la Pradillo wrote in Chapter 42 of the first part of his book *Suma de todas las leyes penales, canónicas y civiles* (Complete digest of penal, canon and civil law), he discussed three ways to give an insult:

> I may insult another by one of three methods: by writing or by the spoken word or in deed. An insult is given in writing when someone produces posters against another, in which he writes and utters defamatory and insulting words, which the law calls defamatory libels. And in such cases, not only he who composes and makes the libel, but also he who sees it and reads it in the cantons does so under pain of death, unless he removes it and tears it up.[31]

Writings on the streets were thus criminalised for their heterodox or damaging criticisms. Libels and pasquinades were liable to be prosecuted immediately, which meant that orders were issued for their immediate removal from wherever they had been posted, and the matter would be referred to the competent authorities for further action.[32] The preservation of these documents and their availability for historical study thus depends directly on this judicial process. The historian relies on inventories of them drawn up by contemporaries, whether they did so in a page of notices, in the course of a journey or in more literary texts. Although such indirect sources do not assist study of the material and graphic qualities of the written texts, we can compensate for this with other indications of their social diffusion.

Judicial measures launched to stop the dissemination of a text usually stated that it was posted in all public places, which means, as we have seen for literary edicts and posters, in those urban spaces where heavy traffic circulated: squares, intersections, church entrances and government buildings.[33] In the trial initiated by the Inquisition in New Spain in 1602 against Gabriel de Arratia, steward of the bishop of Puebla, accused of publishing libels, the prosecution alleged that they were posted 'on merchants' doors'.[34] In Madrid, they were often encountered on the plaza del Palacio, the Guadalajara gate, the Puerta del Sol and the square at the

Court prison.[35] As for the libellists' favourite times, they usually posted material at night, avoiding police patrols. In the case of the libels found on 18 September 1644 on the Pardon door of Cartagena de Indias cathedral, attacking the royal visitor Martín Real and the judge and governor Don Bernardino de Prado, they were reportedly placed there between 'nine and ten at night', by a person 'muffled up in a cape'.[36]

Just as the choice of time and place of publication was an integral part of transgressive and criminalised writing, its language and textual arrangements were important to guarantee its effectiveness. The Castilian vernacular was commonly used, and very often lent itself to poetic compositions (satires, romances, sonnets and 10-line stanzas or *decimas*), dialogues and question-and-answer compositions. It also facilitated memorisation and oral transmission.[37] Let us not forget that many libels were not only displayed on walls, but also sung in the streets. This was the case with the mottoes and poems treating the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, a very controversial subject in the first half of the seventeenth century in both the Iberian Peninsula and America, involving the Jesuits and Franciscans who supported the pontifical interpretation, against the Dominicans who denied that the Virgin Mary had been conceived free of sin.[38] The same applied to the libels against Martín Real and Governor Bernardino de Prado, already mentioned, diffused on half-folio sheets, written in two columns and composed of short, rhythmic phrases suitable for memorisation and singing in the streets (Fig. 5.4).[39]

Attempts were made to protect the anonymity of authors, which allowed gentlemen of rank to defend their collective interests without having to face any unpleasant consequences.[40] Writers might use a deliberately distorted hand, with 'disguised', 'counterfeit' or 'base' characters of poor quality, as they were described in the prosecutions launched against them (Fig. 5.5).[41] All the same, it was recorded in plenty of cases that broken script was not always difficult to decipher, as Cristóbal Téllez de Almazán recognised. As judge in the Audiencia of Manila, he was dealing with some defamatory libels published in July 1599 in the Philippine capital against its governor.[42] Other cases, in contrast, leave a record of the difficulties faced at the time in tracking down the authors, which were especially great in cities without the same judicial infrastructure as, say, Rome or Madrid. This was precisely the argument of Bernardino de Prado Beltrán de Guevara, magistrate of the Audencia of Santa Fe and a judge in Cartagena de Indias, when he discussed the libel

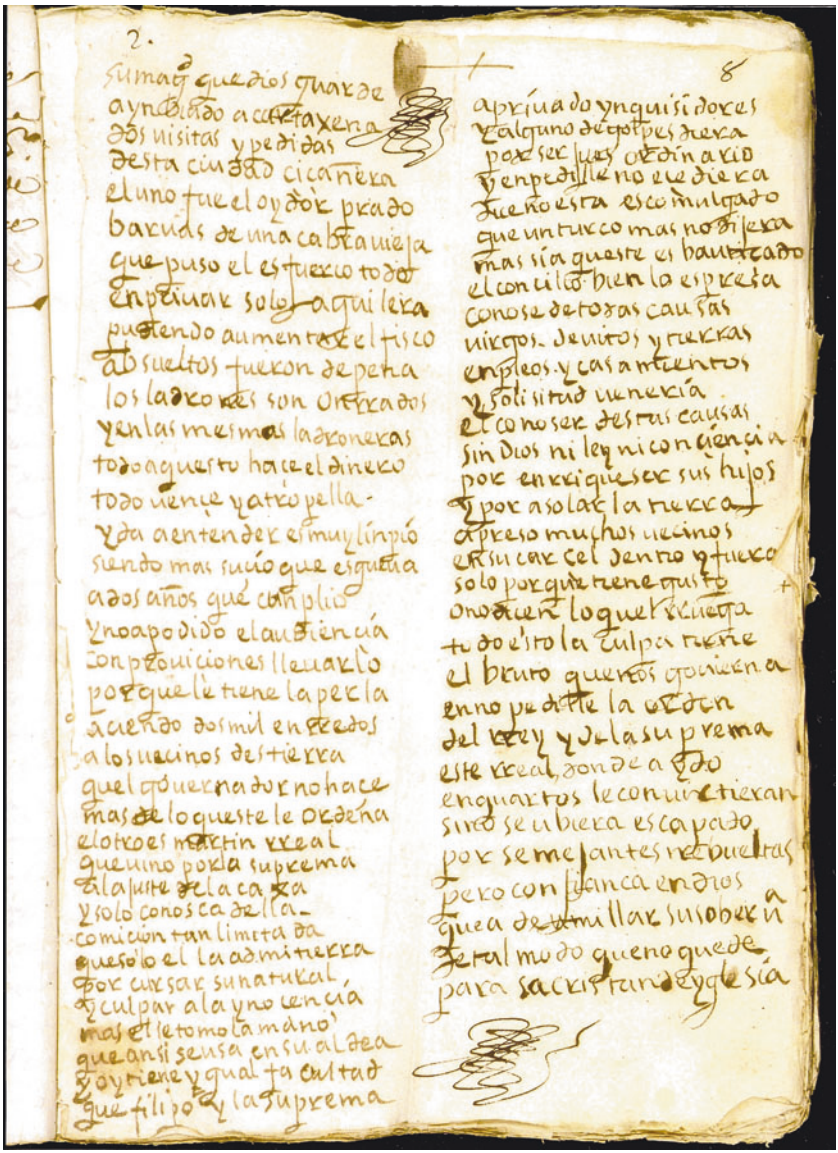


Fig. 5.4 Libel against the Royal Visitor Martín Real and Governor Bernardino de Prado, distributed in Cartagena de Indias, September 1644.
(Madrid, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Inquisición, leg. 16013, exp. 35, no.1, f. 1v.)

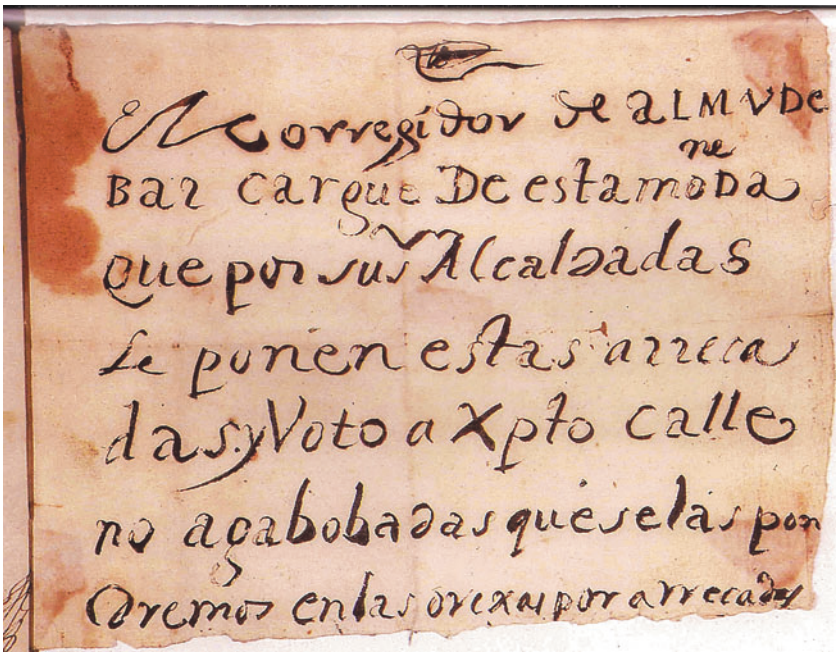


Fig. 5.5 Libel against Pedro Beluti de Haro, mayor of Logroño, 16 September 1680.
(Madrid, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Inquisición, leg. 26179, no. 6, f. 6r.)

which was posted in the main square of Cartagena in April 1641 against the governor Melchor de Aguilera.[43]

It was not usual for authors to sign such writings, but this did not prevent a few authors from taking responsibility in this way. One of the strangest examples is that of the libels produced by the Irishman William Lamport against the Mexican Inquisitors. Guillén Lombardo, who had become hispanicised since his arrival in Corunna in 1630, rose to be adviser and swordsman to the Count-Duke of Olivares. After Olivares fell out of favour with Philip IV in 1643, Lombardo was sent to Mexico to find out whether the former viceroy supported an uprising in Portugal. In the capital of New Spain he was soon arrested and imprisoned by the Inquisition, accused of witchcraft and of conspiring against the regime. On 26 December 1650 he managed

to escape from prison, but he was recaptured within a few days and incarcerated for nine years until his death at the stake on 19 November 1659.[44] Before his execution, however, he had time to write various pieces attacking the Inquisition, including a few libels, duly signed, either in folio format – like his *Declaración de los justos juicios de Dios* (Declaration of God's true judges) – or in half-folio – like the *Pregón de los justos, juicios de Dios, que castigue a quien lo quitare* (Cry of the just, judges of God who punishes all those who abandon him). He filled practically the whole surface of these documents, leaving 'a very narrow margin', and, according to custom, they were attached 'with half-chewed bread to the cathedral door which gives on to the main square, facing the stone cross', so that in this way they could attract more readers.[45] Not only were they read on the spot, but copies were also distributed (and later collected by the Holy Office of Mexico[46]) so that they could be read in the small groups which huddled everywhere in the vicinity of the cathedral, as used to happen in similar cases:

> on Monday, the second day of the feast of the Nativity, between seven and eight in the morning, arriving by Tacuba Street, I saw many people gathered at the corner at the end of it, where there was a new house and shop, reading a large sheet of paper, written in tiny lettering, which was fixed and stuck onto the wall facing the sewer, and the witness read the statement in the first line which said: 'Don Guillén Lombardo, by the Grace of God'. And then at the foot of this sheet there was a name which read: 'Don Guillén Lombardo', in a flourished signature.[47]

The preference for large lettering, whether upper or lower case, is explained by the need for the public display of the document and a striving for greater legibility. Agustín de Vidarte y Ancilla noted as much in connection with the pasquinade found in July 1608 on the north door of the Alcázar in Madrid, accusing the Duke of Lerma of treachery. He observed that it was written 'in large letters', which allowed many people to read it before the gatekeeper took it down at seven in the morning.[48] In other cases it was noted that three pasquinades, posted on the same door, on the Guadalajara gate and in the Court prison, respectively, had been written 'in large and very legible characters' on a half-folio sheet, 'filling up just short of four and a half lines', as can be seen in the original, which has been preserved.[49]

Occasionally the symbiosis between the written text and the spoken word, in the form of songs or jokes which appeared frequently in charivaris (*cencerradas*),[50] was accompanied by gestures designed to humiliate and ridicule the insulted person at his home.[51] He would be stained with dye or other liquids, animal excrement would be thrown over his property, effigies were produced to mock him, while paintings drew attention to his alleged vices. His properties and residences might be marked with insulting signs like horns and the penitent's robe and conical cap, if the accused was a converted Jew.[52] Caricatures and hostile drawings figured prominently in political quarrels, as can be seen in a Portuguese satire of 1641, representing Philip IV and his favourite the Count-Duke of Olivares setting out to avenge Portugal's declaration of independence beneath effigies of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza (Fig. 5.6).[53]

Taken together, these strategies, leading to the eventual appearance of a pasquinade in the city at the break of dawn, produced in most cases a form of writing directed at a broad readership, which was mixed enough to embrace the passers-by in the street and small groups of people gathered in squares and at street corners. In the prosecutions launched by the Inquisition in New Spain, this was precisely the problem. When Gabriel de Arratia was accused in 1602 of attacking the privileges of the Holy Office, it was expressly noted that what contributed most to aggravating his offence was the fact that 'with expressions of great joy, he went through the said town of Puebla de los Ángeles, publishing the said libels in squares and on merchants' doors, offering copies of them to anybody who asked for one'.[54]

Conclusion

In contrast to other writing practices which were more limited in terms of their readership and spaces of diffusion, the urban writings I have discussed in this chapter were distinguished by their attempt to address practically every level of society. Naturally, certain edicts could be of more concern to some groups than others, and some defamatory libels would enjoy greater resonance in the neighbourhood or community where the accused actually lived. The fact that they were ephemeral publications, relating to particular circumstances and specific moments, does not subtract one iota from their importance at the time in transmitting messages which the institutions of government wished to propagate, and this was the job of official edicts and similar writings. They remained important, too, when it came to defying the conduct of political and ecclesiastical authorities, criticising the excesses of

Fig. 5.6 Satirical pasquinade against King Philip IV and Count-Duke of Olivares, published in Lisbon, 1641
(New York, Hispanic Society of America, HC 387/97.)

the ruling class or dissenting from some of the principles which sustained the political, social or moral foundations of the Catholic monarchy on one side or other of the Atlantic.

In spite of widespread illiteracy in this period, the posting of texts on walls and the added impact of oral transmission or the distribution of copies which some authors produced, especially in the case of libels and pasquinades, guaranteed them wide diffusion, within the reach of all, as the closing words of edicts quite appropriately mentioned, for example thus: 'And so that this may be brought to the attention of all, we order the present edict to be posted in the public areas of this village.'[55] The variety of communication technologies adopted – writing, oral transmission and very often images as well – assisted wide circulation among very different social groups. People could thus make use of several different strategies to grasp the contents, clearly deciphering the gist of the text as the Portuguese cobbler João Vicente did. They could perhaps interpret the images as in the pasquinade against Philip IV and the Count-Duke of Olivares personified by Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, or they could listen to what others were reading aloud or singing, as happened so often when writing and the spoken word mutually reinforced each other's impact. Both served to transmit information and mobilise popular opinion in the Hispanic cities of the Golden Age. In fact, no one could avoid them, not even those whose eyesight was failing or who could not get close enough to the walls. Thus we meet a certain Alonso Ruiz de Velasco, who had to make use of eye-glasses to read some libels against the government's financial abuses, 'which discussed disrespectful and insolent matters' in some Castilian villages at the end of January 1574.[56]

Notes

1. This study forms part of the research project '"Scripta in itinere": Discursos, formas y apropiaciones de la cultura escrita en espacios públicos desde la primera Edad Moderna a nuestros días', funded by the Spanish Ministry for the Economy and Competitivity (Ref. HAR2014-51883-P).
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42. AGI, Filipinas, 18B, R. 9, no.126, letter from Manila dated 16 July 1599.
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56. AGS, Patronato Real, leg. 72, doc. 71, f. 1028v–1029v.

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