

# The True Medicine

OLIVA SABUCO DE NANTES BARRERA



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## Introduction

### *Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera, The True Medicine*

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#### *A Book that Was Missing in the World*

In 1587 a volume titled *Nueva Filosofía de la Naturaleza del hombre* was published in Madrid under the name of Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera.<sup>1</sup> “This book is as new and as strange as its author,” we read in the dedication addressed to Philip II:

Kneeling down in Your absence since she cannot kneel  
down in Your presence, a humble maidservant and  
vassal dares to speak. I am made bold by that ancient

1. *Nueva Filosofía de la Naturaleza del hombre, no conocida ni alcançada de los grandes filosofos antiguos: la qual mejora la vida y salud humana. Compuesta por doña Oliva Sabuco* (Madrid: Pedro Madrigal, 1587). This first edition was followed by a second, revised edition, under the same title and by the same press, in 1588. For the purposes of this volume, I have used the text of the *editio princeps* comparing it with the 1588 edition. Unfortunately there is no recent critical edition of Sabuco’s work. The best and most easily accessible modern edition remains that published more than a century ago: Oliva Sabuco de Nantes, *Obras*, ed. Ricardo Fé with a prologue by Octavio Cuartero (Madrid: Establecimiento tipográfico de Ricardo Fé, 1888), which reproduces the text of the 1587 edition with minor variants (it omits the two sonnets in Oliva’s praise by the Licenciado Juan de Sotomayor). For the reader’s convenience, both in this introduction and in the translation that follows, I shall always quote Sabuco’s work from this modern and more easily accessible edition (hereafter Sabuco, *Obras*).

There is now an English translation of the whole Sabuco oeuvre: Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera, *New Philosophy of Human Nature Neither Known to nor Attained By the Great Ancient Philosophers, Which Will Improve Human Life and Health*, trans. and ed. Mary Ellen Waithe, Maria Colomer Vintró, and C. Angel Zorita (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007). My translation was done independently of Waithe’s, Vintró’s, and Zorita’s work, and it was completed before their book came out. Unfortunately, I find myself in disagreement with their views on several important issues, not only concerning some general principles and specific details of the translation but also, most importantly, regarding the authorship of *Nueva Filosofía* (see below, Introduction, 16–22). I indicate these points of disagreement, as well as the most important differences between their rendering and mine, in the notes to the translation.

Unless otherwise stated, all the translations quoted in this Introduction and in the Translation are mine.

## 2 *Editor's Introduction*

law of high chivalry, whereby great lords and high-born knights freely chose to bind and commit themselves always to protect women in their adventures. [...] Thus emboldened, I dare to offer and dedicate this book to Your Catholic Majesty [...] May Your Majesty accept this service of a woman, for I think it is of greater quality than those rendered by men, vassals, or lords, who have exerted themselves in Your Majesty's service. For even though Your Caesarean and Catholic Majesty has had many books dedicated by men, very few and rare are those by women, and none at all on this subject matter.

This address to the king shows great intellectual pride and daring, rather than the conventional modesty displayed by women authors. Although using the *topos* of feminine weakness, Oliva Sabuco strongly emphasizes the novelty and significance of her work—a work that, in her own words, filled a gap in ancient and modern culture:

This book is as strange and as new as its author. It deals with the knowledge of oneself, and offers doctrine whereby man can know and understand himself and his own nature, and learn the natural causes of life, death and disease. [...] This book was missing in the world (*Este libro faltaba en el mundo*) whereas of the other ones there are all too many.<sup>2</sup>

The volume contained several texts in dialogic form: *A Dialogue on Self-Knowledge*; *On the Composition of the World as It Is*; *On the Things that Will Improve the State of the World, and Its Commonwealths*; *On the Aids and Remedies of the True Medicine*; and finally *A Dialogue on the True Medicine*. These vernacular texts are followed by two conclusive dialogues in Latin, *Dicta brevia circa naturam hominis, medicinae fundamentum* (“Brief sayings on the nature of man, the foundation of medicine”) and *Vera philosophia de natura mistorum, hominis et mundi, antiquis ocula* (“True philosophy,

2. Sabuco, *Obras*, XLI–XLII.

unknown to the ancients, of the nature of mixed bodies, of man, and of the world"). These were obviously addressed to learned readers, either philosophers or physicians, but the bulk of the book is in the vernacular, and deliberately so. Ranging from natural philosophy to medicine, from agriculture to political and legal matters, these texts present what claims to be a radically new view of man and world, of microcosm and macrocosm.

*Nueva Filosofia* opens with a long "Dialogue on Self-Knowledge," in which the speakers are three shepherds, Antonio, Veronio, and Rodonio. The three observe Rodonio's father, Macrobio, pass by, a hale and hearty old man, though a nonagenarian, and they start to converse about longevity and the means to die a natural death. Meanwhile, a partridge pursued by a hawk falls dead at their feet. Antonio who, throughout the various dialogues, will be the author's mouthpiece and the representative of the new medicine, notes that the partridge died of fear, which shows how tremendously important are the consequences of the passions of the sensitive soul, fear among them, on the health of animals and men. Yet, Antonio argues, their significance for life and death, health and disease, has been ignored by philosophers and physicians, who have not pursued the most difficult branch of knowledge—the knowledge of one's own self. All creatures are affected by the perturbations of the three parts of the soul: the plants by those of the vegetative soul, the animals by those of the vegetative and the sensitive soul, and man by those of the vegetative and sensitive souls, which he shares with plants and animals, plus those of the rational soul, which belongs only to man. Because man is the only being endowed with the three parts of the soul, he is even more susceptible than plants and animals to the soul's emotions, and in consequence he is more vulnerable to disease. Antonio lists several examples of people who got sick and died of grief, anger, sadness, hatred, shame, fear, anxiety, and despair, but also of excessive joy or pleasure.

Rodonio objects that most people think that disease and death are caused by food. Antonio replies that yes, bad food damages one of man's "two harmonies," but only the minor harmony of the stomach. The perturbations of the soul, however, shatter man's "first harmony," the harmony of the brain. In the view of man's nature that Antonio is

expounding, the brain is the principal organ, the “prince of this house,” as he calls it. Man, Antonio says, is a “tree upside-down”—an ancient metaphor of Platonic origin that here acquires a new significance. The root of man is the brain, which performs in humans the nourishing role that the root performs in plants. Thanks to its “attractive force,” the brain draws up the “chyle,” or nutritive juice, both raw from the mouth and cooked from the stomach, and the brain distributes it, root-wise, to all the body parts. So, Antonio stresses, the main agent of nutrition is the “white chyle,” or juice of the brain, not the blood, as conventionally believed. In health, this white nutritive juice goes up to the brain, but in disease the opposite happens: the nutritive juice falls down and turns into unwholesome catarrh, harming the body parts it reaches. This “flux,” or fall of the brain’s juice can be triggered by several causes, but it is primarily due to the perturbations of the soul. Therefore, Antonio says, the main remedies against disease are those that strengthen “the three pillars of health,” which are cheerfulness, good hope, and the good functioning of the stomach. The primary factors of health are therefore moderation (every form of excess, even of joy or pleasure, can upset the brain’s juice) together with everything that cheers the soul—friendship, *eutrapelia* (i.e., good conversation), music, pleasant scents. The “Dialogue on Self-Knowledge” concludes with Veronio summing up what he learned from Antonio: health is not due to the balance of the four humors, as all physicians wrongly believe, but to the correct functioning of the brain, whose white juice nourishes the body in the same way a root feeds a plant.

In the second dialogue, *On the Composition of the World as It Is*,<sup>3</sup> Veronio asks Antonio to describe, after the microcosm, the macrocosm. This piece is much shorter, because, Antonio says, many authors have already dealt with this subject. To visualize the *maquina del mundo*,<sup>4</sup> one has to imagine an ostrich egg: the small yolk at the center is the earth, surrounded by three layers of “egg-white,” a thicker layer, water, followed by a thinner one, air, and finally an even more rarefied element, conventionally named fire. The egg has eleven shells, the ten heavens plus the Empyreum, “the house

3. Sabuco, *Obras*, 161–81.

4. *Ibid*, 179.

of God,” where “the heavenly court” resides.<sup>5</sup> At first sight, Sabuco’s cosmology seems to replicate in essentials the conventional vision of the universe as it was held in medieval natural philosophy, with the earth at the center. But there are significant novelties in Sabuco’s view of the elements, as will be more fully explained later in the book, where Antonio argues that there are in fact only two elements, earth and water, and not four as in the conventional view (earth, water, air, fire). Air and fire, Antonio states, are just transformations of water, in a rarefied and even more rarefied form.<sup>6</sup> This new theory of the elements is only barely suggested here. But not quite developed are also the correspondences between microcosm and macrocosm, especially between the sun and the heart, the moon and the brain, that will be emphasized in later parts of the work.<sup>7</sup>

There follows another short dialogue *On the Things that Will Improve this World, and Its Commonwealths*,<sup>8</sup> where the conversation among the three shepherds moves on to politics and social criticism. Since Antonio seems to know how to improve individual health, he is asked how to reform the community. The disease of the social body, Antonio replies, is the excessive number of long-protracted lawsuits, which create much misery and despair.<sup>9</sup> This is due fundamentally to two facts: first, there are too many laws and, second, they are written in Latin and are therefore unintelligible to most people. Antonio laments “the murderous burden of law books” that oppresses the

5. Ibid.

6. In this second dialogue Sabuco speaks in fact of “four elements” (163, 174) and calls fire an element (“el elemento del fuego,” 164) but later in the text, especially in the conclusive section of the volume, *Vera philosophia de natura mistorum*, Sabuco argued, in contrast with the conventional Aristotelian view, that there are just two elements, i.e., earth and water—air and fire being respectively rarefied and even more rarefied water. See below, Introduction, 50 and Translation, n123.

7. Especially in the final dialogue, *Vera philosophia de natura mistorum*, where the correspondences between micro and macrocosm are also graphically summarized in a table (Sabuco, *Obras*, 427).

8. Sabuco, *Obras*, 183–204.

9. Sabuco actually states that to start a lawsuit is a mortal sin (ibid, 189)—a proposition that was censored by the Inquisition in the *Indice expurgatorio* of 1632, and consequently struck out of subsequent editions of *Nueva Filosofía*. In the 1888 edition by Ricardo Fé, from which I quote, the sentences censored by the Inquisition are indicated in italics.

country. If laws were in the vernacular, there would be no need for law schools and chairs at the universities. Excess and greed are as bad for the social body as they are for the individual body: if there were no luxury, there would be no poverty. Remedial change is needed especially for the poor, workers, and shepherds, whose health is affected by the misery and despair of their daily lives. Their condition could be improved, Antonio argues, by forbidding the seizure of cattle or work implements for debt<sup>10</sup>; also, by improving aqueducts, and introducing new plants from the Indies. It would also be beneficial to prohibit duels and the absurd code of honor, which derives from pride—a vice of the soul that leads to many social ills. Another remedy—especially important for women—would be to stop giving daughters in marriage for money's sake, as many do who “marry their daughters to a farm, or to cows or sheep.”<sup>11</sup> This is especially important for the procreation of healthy children, because in generation, Sabuco stresses, two seeds are needed. Both the male and the female seed contribute actively to form the embryo—not only the male, as in the Aristotelian doctrine of generation.

The next short dialogue is prefaced by Veronio feeling sick and asking Antonio what remedies he should employ. *A Dialogue on the Aids and Remedies of the True Medicine*<sup>12</sup> follows, where Antonio asserts, first of all, the general goal of the true medicine, which is to bring accord between body and soul (discord of body and soul being the primary cause of disease) and to comfort the brain by means of the three “pillars of health,” namely, with words and deeds that generate joy and good hope, and by taking care of the stomach. The second general remedy will be to divert the humor falling from the brain, so that it can be discharged through the bodily openings (nostrils, mouth, skin pores, etc.) and will not reach the internal organs, especially the stomach and heart, whose “innate heat” would be smothered by the cold humor, causing death. Such “evacuative” remedies (vomiting, sweating, bloodletting, etc.) are employed by animals—and man

10. According to some early modern jurists, this was one of the *privilegia rusticorum*, that is, the customary rights of peasants. See A. M. Hespanha, “Savants et rustiques. La violence douce de la raison juridique,” *Jus Commune* 10 (1983), 1–47.

11. Sabuco, *Obras*, 196–99.

12. *Ibid.*, 204–31.



should learn from them. But the true medicine avoids strong purging and cupping, which may further draw the humor from the head, thus intensifying rather than counteracting the cause of disease.

So far, Antonio's exposition of the new philosophy and medicine has been meant for the layman. The concluding *Dialogue on the True Medicine*,<sup>13</sup> in contrast, together with the two Latin texts, is addressed to a medical audience. The dialogues move therefore from empirical observation of daily life to theoretical speculation, from addressing the general public to addressing learned physicians, from exoteric to esoteric knowledge. To mark the transition, the speakers change: Veronio and Rodonio are gone, and the conversation is between Antonio and an unnamed physician, called Doctor.<sup>14</sup> So far, the medical element had been introduced gradually and in small doses, but now Antonio launches into a full-fledged exposition of an alternative medical system, vigorously pointing out the errors of School medicine. Though displaying considerable knowledge of the medical debates of the times, Sabuco adopts the point of view of the outsider, unshackled by ties to the medical establishment. In the dedication to the king, she declares that she never studied medicine. In order to evaluate the new medical system that she proposes, no learning is needed, only common sense. Whoever will read her book, she argues, will know himself and the true nature of mankind; he will be initiated into the principles of true medicine, he will no longer be dependent on doctors, nor will he be treated by them like a dumb beast "who does not see, hear or understand what they treat it for, not knowing why and to what purpose."<sup>15</sup> The attitude and even the tone adopted are an open challenge to the medical establishment and its intellectual tradition, summed up by the names of Galen, Hippocrates, and Avicenna, the authorities that were dominant in the medical culture of the Renaissance. Sabuco stresses the uncertainty of medicine, borrowing from Pliny's virulent polemic against the medical profession: *Vera*

13. *Vera Medicina y vera filosofia* in the 1587 edition.

14. To further highlight the special character of this part of the work, the dialogue on "The True Medicine" is prefaced by another *carta dedicatoria*, addressed to don Francisco Zapata, Conde de Barajas and Presidente del Consejo de Castilla. In the 1888 edition this dedication appears instead at the front of the book (*Obras*, XLV–XLVI).

15. "Carta dedicatoria al Rey nuestro señor," in *Obras*, XLII–XLIII.

*Medicina* opens with a long quotation of the section from the ninth book of the *Natural History*, where Pliny famously summed up the history of medicine as a long inconclusive succession of medical sects, all purporting to be right but all unable to reach true knowledge of the causes of disease. Echoing Pliny's arguments, Sabuco says that the Saracens and the Chinese, who have no professional physicians, have a larger population than the Spaniards (in other words, they have a lower mortality rate). "Only in this art [i.e., medicine] may anybody declare himself a physician without being such; no other falsehood implies more danger and damage [than the medical falsehood], and less punishment at the same time: only the doctor is allowed to kill with impunity."<sup>16</sup>

This dialogue *On the True Medicine* is the text that is translated and presented here, as part of the "Other Voice in Early Modern Europe" series.<sup>17</sup> It is, as we shall see, a text that bears a significant relation to the Renaissance *Querelle des femmes*, beyond the remarkable circumstance of being emphatically presented as the work of a woman author. But before we examine in detail the content of the *Dialogue on the True Medicine* and locate it in the context of the medical and cultural world of the late Renaissance, as I shall try to do in this Introduction, we have to address a preliminary question. Who was this daring woman who attacked so uncompromisingly the medical establishment of her times?

### *The Precarious Fame of Doña Oliva: The Issue of Authorship*

We know that she became immediately famous. At the beginning of the seventeenth century Lope de Vega called her "the tenth Muse," listing her with other women prodigies of Europe.<sup>18</sup> The *picara* Justina,

16. *Vera medicina*, in Sabuco, *Obras*, 239.

17. For an English translation of the whole Sabuco oeuvre see Sabuco, *New Philosophy of Human Nature* (cit. in n1 above); the translation of *Vera Medicina* is at 177–252. For differences between that translation and mine, see below, Note on the Translation, 85–89.

18. "Dona Isabel Esforcia fue ilustrisima / en letras y virtud, y en Milan fenix: \ dona Oliva de Nantes, Musa decima, \ y dona Valentina de Pinelo / Que hermosura ha nacido en nuestros siglos, / como dona Maria Enriquez tuvo, / que hoy llora Tormes, y la envidia misma?" (*El hijo prodigo*, in book 4 of the novel *El peregrino en su patria*, published in Seville in 1604, but

the roguish heroine of a popular novel of this period (1605), sang her own praise by bragging to be “more famous even than doña Oliva” and other very celebrated personages indeed:

I am the queen of Picardy  
 More universally known than the herb rue,  
 More famous even than Doña Oliva,  
 Don Quixote and Lazarillo,  
 Alfarach and Celestina.<sup>19</sup>

As these verses seem to indicate, the learned Oliva soon became a protagonist of popular imagination, as famed as fictional characters such as Don Quixote, Lazarillo de Tormes, and Celestina.

Oliva Sabuco's name was included for centuries in the repertories of Spain's “illustrious women”<sup>20</sup> but in point of fact very little

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written much earlier according to M. Menendez y Pelayo, introduction to *Obras de Lope de Vega*, vol. 6 [Madrid: Atlas, 1963], XIX, BAE vol. 157). The Italian Isabella Sforza was the author of *Della vera tranquillità dell'animo* (1544). Valentina de Pinelo defended women's right to interpret Holy Scripture in a book in praise of St. Anne (1601), for which Lope wrote two introductory sonnets: see Lola Luna, “Sor Valentina Pinelo, intérprete de las Sagradas Escrituras,” *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos* 464 (Feb. 1989), 91–103. On Lope's *filoginia erudita* and his views on learned women see Simon A. Vosters, “Lope de Vega y las damas doctas,” in *Actas del Tercer Congreso Internacional de Hispanistas*, ed. Carlos H. Magis (México, Por la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas: El Colegio de México, 1970), 909–21.

19. “Soy la rein-de Picardí, / Más que la rud-conoci-/ Más famo-que Doña Oli-, / Que Don Quijo-y Lazari, / Que Alfarach-y Celesti” See *La pícara Justina*, ed. Bruno M. Damiani (Madrid: José Porrúa Turanzas, 1982), 376.

20. A few examples: Pedro Pablo de Ribera, *Le Glorie immortali de' trionfi et heroiche imprese d'ottocento quarantacinque donne illustri antiche, e moderne...*, (Venice: Evangelista Deuchino, 1609), 331 (Oliva is no. 482 on this list of 485 illustrious women); Nicolás Antonio, *Bibliotheca Hispana sive Hispanorum...* (Rome: Nicolò Angelo Tinassi, 1672), 2.347ff; Fr. Benito Feijóo Montenegro, *Teatro crítico universal* (Madrid: Lorenzo Francisco Mojados, 1726), vol. 1, *discurso* XVI: “Defensa de las Mugeres,” 357–58; Damião de Froes Perym, *Theatro heroino...e catalogo de las mullieres illustres em armas, letras acçoens heroicas, e artes liberales*, 2 vols. (Lisbon: Theotom Antunex Lima, 1736–40), 2. 298–99; Juan Bautista Cubié, *Las mugeres vindicadas de las calumnias de los hombres. Con un Catalogo de las Españolas que más se han distinguido en Ciencias y Armas* (Madrid: Antonio Perez de Soto, 1768), 131–33.

For a bibliography of commentators on Sabuco's work, see F. Rodriguez de la Torre, “Bibliografía de comentaristas y referencias sobre Miguel Sabuco (antes D.a Oliva ) y su obra,” *Al-Basit* 13 (Dec. 1987), 233–65.

was—and still is—known about her. We know that she was born in Alcaraz, in the archdiocese of Toledo, in 1562, as stated in her baptism certificate, which was published in 1853.<sup>21</sup> This document calls her daughter of the *bachiller* Miguel Sabuco. She was twenty-five years old when her book was published. The surnames Barrera and de Nantes used on the title page of *Nueva Filosofía* are actually, as we learn from the baptism register, the maiden names of her two godmothers, Barbara Barrera and Bernardina de Nantes. From the same document we also gather that one of her godfathers was a doctor, Alonso de Heredia. Strong documentary evidence indicates that her father, Miguel Sabuco, was an apothecary in Alcaraz.<sup>22</sup> We also know that by 1588, the year in which a second edition of *Nueva Filosofía* was published in Madrid, Oliva was already married to a certain Acacio de Buedo. We know this from her father's will, written in the same year, which mentions conflicts with his son-in-law about Oliva's dowry.<sup>23</sup> Finally, it was thought that she died before 1622, the year in which another edition of *Nueva Filosofía* came out in Braga, Portugal, because in the preface to this new edition we are told that the "authoress" is no longer living, and that her book had hitherto met hostility and "calumny."<sup>24</sup> But this *terminus ante quem* of Oliva's death has been disputed recently on the basis of new evidence, as we shall see.

Besides these three editions, the book was reprinted in 1728 by the physician Martín Martínez, an enthusiastic supporter

21. J. M. Muñoz y Ferron, "Noticias acerca de doña Oliva Sabuco," *Gaceta Médica* IX:10–11 (1853), 73–76, 81–86; E. Pérez de Pareja, *Historia de la primera fundación de Alcaraz* (Valencia: Joseph Tomás Lucas, 1740), 208, had already mentioned Oliva's birth date.

22. This was first indicated by José Marco Hidalgo (*Biografía de Doña Oliva Sabuco* [Madrid: Librería de Antonio Romero, 1900], 30), based on an entry he found in one of the *libros de libramientos* of the city council of Alcaraz: "4 de febrero de 1572 = Así mesmo se mandó librar en el dicho mayordomo al Bachiller Sabuco, boticario, 17.200 maravedís de medicinas que se tomaron para los pobres como consta por una tasación del doctor Heredia, Médico."

23. On Miguel Sabuco's will, see below, 12–13.

24. *Nueva Filosofía de la Naturaleza del hombre, no conocida ni alcançada de los grandes filosofos antiguos: la qual mejora la vida, y salud humana.... Composta por Doña Oliva Sabuco* (Braga: Fructuoso Lourenço de Basto, 1622). Oliva's death is mentioned in the dedication to Dom Joam Lobo Baram D'Albito ("Pello que o Liuro, et sua autora [aiudapois de morta] parece me estão pedindo o nao tire outravez a luz sem protector que com seu valor o anime, et defenda das calumnias de que o favor de hu Monarcha o nao pode defender...").

of Oliva Sabuco's medical theories. In 1734 it was translated into Portuguese and published in Lisbon. In the nineteenth century it was reprinted several times (1847, 1873, and 1888).<sup>25</sup> Thus the book kept being read for centuries. It is mentioned in seventeenth-century medical bibliographies such as Lindenius's *De scriptis medicis*, and Lipenius's *Bibliotheca realis medica*, which listed it under the heading *anthropologia*.<sup>26</sup> In the eighteenth century, Albrecht von Haller included it in his *Bibliotheca anatomica*, citing the editions of 1588, 1622, and 1728, and summarizing the content with these words: "Man is a tree upside down, the juice of the nerves nourishes the whole body"<sup>27</sup>—an apt summary of Sabuco's medical theory. As we shall see, the bold new ideas advanced in *Nueva Filosofía* circulated in the European medical culture of the seventeenth century, and they gained special prominence in the Enlightenment, when the Spanish literati revived and praised the work of Oliva Sabuco, making her into a heroine of national medical progress. Even in the nineteenth century Oliva was still part of the catalogues of Spanish female "worthies." She was remembered as a pioneer in the study of the nervous system and of the psychosomatic nature of disease. For centuries, nobody questioned her authorship of the texts collected in *Nueva Filosofía*, though doubts were entertained occasionally. A nineteenth-century historian of medicine, for instance, while commenting upon the book,

25. On the editions of *Nueva Filosofía* see José Fernández Sánchez, "Ediciones de la obra de Miguel Sabuco (antes Doña Oliva)," *Al-Basit* 13 (Dec. 1987), 87–103; and Mercedes Caridad García Gómez, *La concepción de la naturaleza humana en la obra de Miguel Sabuco* (Albacete: Instituto de Estudios Albacetenses de la Excma Diputación de Albacete, Serie I, *Estudios* 62 [1992], 16–17). The editions of 1847 and 1873 were partial: they included only the first and the third dialogues, namely, the *Dialogue on Self-Knowledge* and that *On the Things that Will Improve the State of the World, and Its Commonwealths*.

26. See Lindenius [Jan Antonides van der Linden], *De scriptis medicis*, (Amsterdam: Blaeu, 1651), 502; see also *Lindenius Renovatus, sive Johannis Antonidae van der Linden, De Scriptis medicis...*, ed. Georg Abraham Mercklinus (Nuremberg: Johannes Georgius Endterius, 1686), 856 (that quotes the Madrid edition of 1588 as Oliva Sabugo, *Nova Philosophia de Homini Natura. In qua Medicorum quaedam Paradoxa refelluntur*). Martinus Lipenius [Martin Lipen], *Bibliotheca realis medica* (Frankfurt: Johannes Fridericus, 1679).

27. A. von Haller, *Bibliotheca anatomica* (Zürich: Orell, Gessner, Fuessli, 1774), 1.265: "Oliva Sabuga [*sic*] de Nantes Barrera": "Hominem esse inversam arborem, succum nervorum totum corpus alere." On the history of the notion of *arbor inversa*, see Carl-Martin Edsman, "Arbor inversa," in *Festschrift Walter Baetke* (Weimar: Böhlhaus, 1966), 85–109.

expressed some skepticism at the possibility that a woman could have authored a work of such significance.<sup>28</sup>

At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the fame of doña Oliva ran up against a formidable challenge. In 1903 a scholar from Alcaraz, José Marco Hidalgo, who had already written a short biography of Oliva Sabuco<sup>29</sup> and was looking for more documentary evidence in the local archives, found and published three notarial records, which seemed to him conclusive proof that the true author of *Nueva Filosofía* had been Oliva's father, the *bachiller* Miguel Sabuco.<sup>30</sup> What were these documents and what did they say? The first was an *escritura de obligación*, dated 10 September 1587, whereby Alonso Sabuco—Miguel Sabuco's son and Oliva's brother—pledged himself together with his wife to return a sum of 120 ducats to Miguel Sabuco. This sum had been entrusted to Alonso to cover his expenses for a trip to Portugal, undertaken with the goal of having *Nueva Filosofía* printed there, so that it could be sold in Portugal and in the Portuguese Indies. Another document was a *carta de poder*, dated 11 September 1587, by which Miguel Sabuco entrusted power of attorney to his son Alonso for the purpose of going to Portugal to take care of this new edition of *Nueva Filosofía*. At the beginning of this document, Miguel Sabuco declared himself to be “the author of the book titled *Nueva Filosofía*, and father of doña Oliva, my own daughter, whom I set up as author only to grant her the honor but not the profit and interest [from the book].”<sup>31</sup> A third document is the last will and testament of

28. Anastasio Chinchilla, *Anales Historicos de la medicina en general y biografico-bibliograficos de la española en particular*, Vol. I, repr. (New York and London, 1967), 303–4, 311. But even in the early eighteenth century, at the heyday of Oliva's fame during the Spanish medical Enlightenment, Doctor Martínez, a fervent supporter of Sabuco's ideas, had defended Oliva's authorship against the charges of those who argued “que esta obra no fue de mujer” (quoted in Luis Sánchez Granjel, *Humanismo y medicina* [Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca 1968], 22, n12).

29. Marco Hidalgo, *Biografía de Doña Oliva Sabuco*.

30. José Marco Hidalgo, “Doña Oliva de Sabuco no fué escritora,” in *Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos*, 9:7 (July 1903), 1–13.

31. “autor del libro intitulado Nueva Filosofía, padre que soy de doña Oliva, mi hija, a quien puse por autor solo para darle la honrra y no el provecho ni interes”: Marco Hidalgo, “Doña Oliva de Sabuco no fué escritora,” 4. The two documents are transcribed in Marco Hidalgo's article: see p. 3 for the *carta de obligación*, and p. 4 for the *carta de poder*.

the same Miguel Sabuco, dated 20 February 1588, in which he stated to the same effect:

I declare that I composed a book entitled *Nueva Filosofía* or norm, and another book that will be printed, in all of which I gave and give as author the said Luisa de Oliva my daughter, only to give her the name and the honor, and I reserve for myself the fruit and profit that may result from the said books, and I bid the said daughter of mine, Luisa de Oliva, not to meddle with the said privilege, under penalty of my curse, in consideration of what has been said, beyond which I have made an attestation to the effect that I am the author and she is not. Which attestation is in a legal document executed before the notary Villarreal.<sup>32</sup>

Marco Hidalgo declared that he had not come across this last-mentioned document among the papers of the notary Villarreal, some of which had been lost.<sup>33</sup> He claimed, however, that the documents

32. "Aclaro que yo conpuse un libro yntitulado Nueva Filosofía e una Norma y otro libro que se ynprimyran, en los quales todos puse e pongo por autora a la dicha Luisa de oliba mi hija: solo por darle El nombre e la honrra, y Reservo El fruto y probecho que rretultare de los dichos libros para my, y mando a la dicha my hija Luisa de oliva no se entremeta en el dicho privilegio, so pena de my maldición, atento lo dicho demas que tengo fecha ynformacion de como yo soy El autor y no Ella. La qual ynformación està en unas escrituras que pasó ante Villarreal escribano." The text of the testament is on pp. 5–8 of Marco Hidalgo's article, but the relevant part of the document has been transcribed again, with greater precision, by Domingo Henares, *El bachiller Sabuco en la filosofía médica del Renacimiento español* (Albacete, 1976), 63 and by Rodríguez de la Torre, "El autor y la autoría en la obra de Sabuco," 203. The three transcriptions vary slightly from each other, but both Henares and Rodríguez de la Torre read "ynprimyran" and not "ymprimieron," meaning that the verb is in the future not the past tense. I have not seen the document and I quote it here from Rodríguez de la Torre's transcription. One more transcription of the document, by Waithe and Vintró, is viewable on their website [www.sabuco.org](http://www.sabuco.org) (they publish their translation of the document in an appendix to *New Philosophy of Human Nature*, 322–27). They do not mention the transcriptions by Henares and Rodríguez de la Torre, which well preceded theirs. Like Marco Hidalgo, they read "ymprimieron" and translate consequently.

33. Marco Hidalgo, "Doña Oliva de Sabuco no fué escritora," 8. However, it is possible that Miguel Sabuco might have simply alluded to the *carta de poder* executed with the notary

he had found were quite sufficient to establish with absolute certainty that Miguel Sabuco was the true author of *Nueva Filosofía*. Marco Hidalgo's main argument was that nobody would lie in his will, and that, moreover, no father would threaten to curse a child if not for good and valid reasons. We should notice, however, that Miguel's testament proves the existence of a quarrel between him and Oliva and her husband on matters concerning her dowry. Specifically, the document mentions a *manda*, promised by Miguel to Acacio de Buedo, Oliva's husband, "*manda* which was not valid for being excessive, and exceeding my capability, as well as for being detrimental to the interests of my other children." This broken mandate led apparently to a *pleito* (lawsuit), later resolved, however, by mutual agreement.<sup>34</sup> In view of all this, it is certainly interesting that Miguel Sabuco declared himself to be interested in the "*probecho y interes*," not the fame and glory deriving from *Nueva Filosofía*. Clearly, there were financial problems between Oliva and her father, but Marco Hidalgo chose to disregard them as grounds for questioning Miguel Sabuco's claim to the authorship of the book.

There is another point where Marco Hidalgo's inferences from these documents seem rather shaky. He noticed that Miguel Sabuco claimed to be the author of *Nueva Filosofía*, but never explicitly mentioned the title of the most directly medical part of the volume, *Vera Medicina*. Marco Hidalgo solved this problem with no documentary basis at all. He asserted that *Vera Medicina* was probably written by Oliva's godfather, the physician Alonso de Heredia.<sup>35</sup> Both father and godfather of the lucky girl, he argued, moved by "extraordinary love" for their respective daughter and goddaughter, jointly agreed to let her shine in public as the author of their work, though nothing in the sources even remotely suggested this possibility.

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Villarreal on 11 September 1587, some months before he made his will.

34. "Item declaro que quando case a Luisa De Oliva con Acacio de Buedo, vecino desta ciudad, le hice cierta manda la qual conforme a derecho no hera balida por ser excesiva y esceder de lo que yo podia y ser en perjuicio de los demas mys hijos, y se tuvo pleito y nos concertamos por bien de paz, e hizo carta de dote el dicho Acacio de Buedo en cinquenta e dos mill quinyientos maravedis que recibí de my en dos viñas y ajuar y ropas y reales; mando los reciva en quenta" (Marco Hidalgo, "Doña Oliva de Sabuco no fué escritora," 6).

35. Marco Hidalgo, "Doña Oliva de Sabuco no fué escritora," 11.



Be that as it may, this short article, with its limited documentary evidence, almost sufficed to erase Oliva's name from the historical record. In the twentieth century, the biographical dictionaries generally include only her father, Miguel Sabuco ("formerly doña Oliva"), and until recently almost all the historians who have analyzed the book uniformly believed in Miguel Sabuco's claim.<sup>36</sup>

Marco Hidalgo's solution seems to me biased by excessive skepticism of female authorship, an attitude typical of early twentieth-century positivist historiography, and that led unfortunately, in several cases, to the over-hasty denial of the authenticity of texts, which later scholarship would recognize as written by women.<sup>37</sup> In

36. Marco Hidalgo's view was adopted by the author of the first twentieth-century monograph on Sabuco: Benjamín Marcos, *Miguel Sabuco (antes Doña Oliva)* (Madrid: Biblioteca Filosófica, 1923), as well as by almost all subsequent Spanish scholars. A notable exception was Gregorio Marañón, who, however, simply seems to have been unaware of Marco Hidalgo's archival findings. See G. Marañón, "La literatura científica en los siglos XVI y XVII," in *Historia General de las Literaturas Hispánicas* (Barcelona: Barna, 1953), 951–53.

Among the most important contributions on *Nueva Filosofía* that put implicit faith in Miguel Sabuco's claim to authorship are Luis Sánchez Granjel, "La doctrina antropológico-médica de Miguel Sabuco," in Luis Sánchez Granjel, *Humanismo y medicina* (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1968), 15–74; Domingo Henares, *El bachiller Sabuco*; the monographic issue of *Al-Basit* 13 (Dec. 1987), on Miguel Sabuco; García Gómez, *La concepción de la naturaleza humana en la obra de Miguel Sabuco*; and Josep Lluís Barona, "Una refutación del galenismo: naturaleza humana y enfermedad en Miguel Sabuco," in J. L. Barona, *Sobre medicina y filosofía natural en el Renacimiento* (Valencia: Seminari d'Estudis sobre la Ciència, 1993).

37. A case in point is that of Trotula, a *medica* (woman healer) of the Salernitan School (eleventh–twelfth centuries). Her authorship of a treatise on women's diseases had been disputed already in the Renaissance, but it was in the early twentieth century that it was most aggressively questioned. In 1921 a German historian, arguing exclusively from the evidence of one manuscript (now lost) in which the name Trotula appeared abbreviated with a notation that he read as the masculine suffix *us*, asserted that Trotula never existed, and that a Salernitan doctor named Trottus had existed instead. John Benton reconsidered the whole issue some years ago, showing persuasively that the text conventionally attributed to Trotula was not really hers, but that another text called *Practica secundum Trota* is undoubtedly presented, in the earliest manuscript tradition, as the work of a woman (John Benton, "Trotula, Women's Problems, and the Professionalization of Medicine in the Middle Ages," in *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 59 [1985], 30–53). On the history of the controversy over Trotula's historical existence and authorship see Monica H. Green, "In Search of an 'Authentic' Women's Medicine: The Strange Fates of Trota of Salerno and Hildegard of Bingen,"

the last decades, of course, the attitude has been completely different, if not almost antithetical. There has been a strong historical interest in women authors, and the pendulum of scholarly bias, long hostile to them, has possibly swung all the way in their favor. As we may expect, Oliva's authorship has been reclaimed recently from a feminist viewpoint, though with none or very little argument to support the claim.<sup>38</sup> And since books by women authors sell in these times, it is not surprising that *Nueva Filosofía* was reissued in Madrid in a partial edition, mainly for commercial, not scholarly, purposes, once again under the name of Oliva Sabuco, although the editor had no new evidence to provide on the authorship issue.<sup>39</sup> Even more recently,

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*Dynamis* 19 (1999), 35–43. For a thorough reappraisal of the issue of Trotula's authorship see now Monica H. Green, Introduction, in *The Trotula. A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine*, ed. and trans. Monica H. Green, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 48–51.

38. The issue of authorship was first argued in Oliva's favor on purely speculative grounds by Mary Ellen Waithe, "Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera," in Mary Ellen Waithe, *A History of Women Philosophers* (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 2.261–84. For another essay that reclaimed Oliva's authorship from a feminist point of view while offering no argument in support of the claim (besides the speculations already advanced by Waithe, plus a generalized suspicion toward a "proyecto secular de cancelación de autoridad femenina y de genealogía materna que es inherente al orden patriarcal") see María-Milagros Rivera Garretas, "Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera," in *Breve historia feminista de la literatura española (en lengua castellana)*, ed. Iris M. Zavala (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1997), 4.131–46 (I would like to thank Milagros Rivera for allowing me to consult this text when still in manuscript). Oliva's authorship is also argued, from a feminist perspective but with no cogent reasons, by Dámaris M. Otero-Torres, "'Una humilde sierva osa hablar' o la ley del padre: Dislocaciones entre texto femenino y autoría masculina en 'La carta introductoria al Rey nuestro Señor' de Oliva Sabuco de Nantes" in *Taller de Letras* 26 (1998), 9–27; Dámaris M. Otero-Torres, "Texto femenino/autoridad masculina: problemas de autoría en torno a la *Nueva Filosofía de la Naturaleza del Hombre* (1587), de Oliva Sabuco de Nantes," in *Lecturas críticas de textos hispánicos: Estudios de literatura española Siglo de Oro*, ed. Florencia Calvo and Melchora Romanos (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria, 2000), 2.107–13.

The entry on Oliva Sabuco in *Women Writers of Spain. An Annotated Bio-Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Carolyn L. Galerstein (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 283–84, while pointing out that "several male historians in this century claim that the first book was written by her father," concedes that the issue of authorship is controversial and raises questions "not answered to date."

39. Oliva Sabuco de Nantes y Barrera, *Nueva Filosofía de la Naturaleza del Hombre y otros escritos*, ed. Atilano Martínez Tomé (Madrid, Editora Nacional, 1981). This edition includes

Mary Ellen Waithe and Maria Colomer Vintró have argued for Oliva's authorship of *Nueva Filosofía* on the ground of what they claim is "new evidence" they have unearthed through research in the local archives.<sup>40</sup> In my opinion, however, solving the question of authorship in favor of Oliva, on the ground of inconclusive evidence and pseudo-feminist bias, is just as unsatisfactory as the old solution in favor of Miguel, inspired as it was by a positivism strongly flavored with male chauvinism.<sup>41</sup> Clearly, the mystery surrounding the true authorship of *Nueva Filosofía* has not yet been dispelled.

Let us go by the evidence. What is known, first of all, of Miguel Sabuco himself? As already mentioned, there is evidence that a Bachiller Sabuco was apothecary in Alcaraz in the 1570s.<sup>42</sup>

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only the first three dialogues. On the many errors in this text see the critical comments by Rodríguez de la Torre, "Bibliografía de comentaristas y referencias sobre Miguel Sabuco (antes d.a Oliva) y su obra," 261–62, and the review by Álvaro Martínez Vidal in *Llull, Boletín de la Sociedad Española de Historia de las Ciencias*, 7/13, (1984), 109–10.

40. See below, n52.

41. Another article that has recently revisited the authorship issue in favor of Miguel is Fernando Rodríguez de la Torre, "El autor y la autoría en la obra de Sabuco," *Al-Basit* 13 (Dec. 1987), 191–213, which however does not bring any strong new evidence to bear on the issue. He argues that the woodcut signature and *rubrica* of the author in the first edition of *Nueva Filosofía* (a rare feature in sixteenth-century books) corresponds to that of Miguel Sabuco's testament (195–98). He also points out several references throughout the text to the *autor* (not *autora*), suggesting that Miguel Sabuco had meant them as a *buscapié*, i.e., a hint to the true identity of the author. On the issue of the signature, however, it should be noted that another scholar, Domingo Henares, had already compared the signature in the book with that of Miguel Sabuco's will, as well as with a document from the University of Alcalá signed by the Miguel Sabuco who was a student there. According to Henares, the signatures do not seem to be by the same person (Henares, *El bachiller Sabuco*, 87).

42. Marco Hidalgo, *Biografía de Doña Oliva Sabuco*, 30, first located an entry mentioning a "Bachiller Sabuco, boticario" in one of the *libros de libramientos* of the city council of Alcaraz, dated 4 February 1572 (see above, n22). According to a scholar who has re-examined the archival documentation recently, the correct date of this document is 23 December 1572 (see Aurelio Pretel Marín, *Alcaraz en el siglo de Andrés de Vandelvira, el Bachiller Sabuco y el Preceptor Abril: cultura, sociedad, arquitectura y otras bellas artes en el Renacimiento*. Albacete: Instituto de Estudios Albacetenses "Don Juan Manuel" de la Excm. Disputacion de Albacete, Serie I. *Estudios* 111 (1999), 242. In his 1976 book on Sabuco, Domingo Henares argued that the documentation identified by Marco Hidalgo was not conclusive, because the surname Sabuco was rather common in Alcaraz at that time; he also pointed out that Miguel's son Alonso was called *boticario* in later documents, so the 1572 entry might have referred to

Furthermore, documents from 1542 to 1544 attest that a Miguel Sabuco from Alcaraz was studying canon law in those years at the University of Alcalá de Henares.<sup>43</sup> This is interesting, considering the bitter invective against the “murderous burden of law books” written in Latin, for the puzzlement of common people and the fattening of lawyers, denounced by the author of *Nueva Filosofía* in the dialogue *On the Things that Will Improve this World, and Its Commonwealths*. The evidence that Miguel Sabuco studied at a prominent university, besides fitting with the title of *bachiller* (baccalaureate) under which he is mentioned in several documents, fits also with a detail of his testament, namely, the obligation that his son Alonso and his son-in-law Acacio de Buedo, Oliva’s husband, were under, of paying him a yearly sum, partly in books.<sup>44</sup> Identifying Miguel Sabuco the apothecary with the Miguel Sabuco formerly student at Alcalá is somewhat hypothetical, however, since the name Sabuco was fairly common in Alcaraz in this period. Going over the city records, for instance, mention has been found of a Miguel Sabuco who was named *letrado* (presumably, secretary) of the Alcaraz city council in 1590.<sup>45</sup> But nothing indicates that this might have been the apothecary Miguel Sabuco, presumed author of *Nueva Filosofía*. More recently Aurelio Pretel Marín, a scholar who has worked on the local archival records for a book on Alcaraz, has established that there were at least three Miguel Sabucos in the town in this period. Trying to identify the presumed author of *Nueva Filosofía* among them, he says, is “a difficult and incomplete puzzle.”<sup>46</sup>

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him, though Alonso was only twenty-two at the time (see Henares, *El bachiller Sabuco*, 72; on the surname Sabuco, documented in the town since the 1450s, 66).

43. These documents from the registries of the University of Alcalá de Henares were first published by Manuel Serrano y Sanz, *Apuntes para una biblioteca de escritoras españolas desde del año 1401 al 1833* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional, 1903–05), 2.173 (Serrano y Sanz was the first scholar to acknowledge Marco Hidalgo’s 1903 discovery of Miguel Sabuco’s claim to be the author of *Nueva Filosofía*). On these documents see also Henares, *El Bachiller Sabuco*, 74–77; and García Gómez, *La concepción de la naturaleza humana en la obra de Miguel Sabuco*, 14.

44. This detail had already been pointed out by Marco Hidalgo in his 1903 article (“Doña Oliva de Sabuco no fué escritora,” 7 and 10).

45. Benjamín Marcos, *Miguel Sabuco*, 74; Henares, *El Bachiller Sabuco*, 67.

46. Pretel Marín, *Alcaraz en el siglo de Andrés de Vandelvira*, 241–42, 250. Some of these problems of identification had already been raised by Henares, *El Bachiller Sabuco*, 67–68.

This much is indisputable, however. In the municipal books of Alcaraz there is mention several times during the 1570s of payments on account of medicines for the poor, due to a Bachiller Sabuco who was an apothecary. In the 1580s Alonso Sabuco is mentioned instead, also as an apothecary, so presumably the father's trade was passed on to the son in those years.<sup>47</sup> Notarial documentation on the Bachiller Miguel Sabuco, father of Alonso and Oliva, shows him often in the role of godfather or witness in various transactions, indicating that he was well connected both among the common people and the upper social strata of the town.<sup>48</sup> His social level was the rising middle class. So this profile of Oliva's father emerges: he had studied in the 1540s at the University of Alcalá; he was an avid reader, who bought books every year; he worked as an apothecary (and in this respect, it must be pointed out that considerable knowledge of *materia medica* and pharmacopeia is displayed by the author of *Nueva Filosofía*).<sup>49</sup> He served the community possibly holding the municipal office of *síndico* and *procurador*,<sup>50</sup> he belonged to the middle class, and had a social network that included people of presumably higher social standing, like the Dr. Heredia, who was godfather to his daughter Oliva. When considering Sabuco's possible social network, moreover, it should be noted that sixteenth-century Alcaraz, though a small city, was a site of vibrant humanist learning, centered around the figure of Simón Abril, teacher of grammar and rhetoric for the city in the years 1578–83,

47. Pretel Marín, *Alcaraz en el siglo de Andrés de Vandelvira*, 243.

48. *Ibid.*, 246.

49. On the considerable knowledge of *materia medica* possessed by the author of *Nueva Filosofía*, see María del Carmen Francés Causapé, "Miguel Sabuco Álvarez y la farmacia," *Al-Basit* 13 (Dec. 1987), 105–10. Miguel Sabuco's profile as a literate apothecary was not unusual in this period: see Pretel Marín, *Alcaraz en el siglo de Andrés de Vandelvira*, 243, for another example of a local apothecary who was the author of literary works. On the role of apothecaries in the early modern Spanish medical establishment, see the fundamental study by John Tate Lanning, *The Royal Protomedicato. The Regulation of the Medical Profession in the Spanish Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 230–60.

50. Notarial evidence indicates that a Miguel Sabuco was *procurador* and *síndico* for the commune of Alcaraz in the 1560s (Pretel Marín, *Alcaraz en el siglo de Andrés de Vandelvira*, 242–45). According to Pretel Marín, this may or may not have been the Bachiller Sabuco who was an apothecary; but it is unlikely that the same may have held the high office of *letrado* of the city in 1590, as suggested by Marcos (see above, n45).

a promoter of the reform of academic studies and, like Sabuco, an advocate of the use of the vernacular in law and medicine.<sup>51</sup>

Let us now examine the new evidence on whose ground Waithe and Colomer Vintró believe they have demonstrated Oliva's authorship of *Nueva Filosofía*.<sup>52</sup> They point out that of the three documents found by Marco Hidalgo in 1903, only the will survives, and that the sentence where Miguel Sabuco claimed to be the author of *Nueva Filosofía*, which occurs at the end of the document, immediately preceding the notarial paragraph identifying the testator and witnesses, may have been interpolated after the will was signed by the witnesses. Their main reason for this rather far-fetched hypothesis is that the three priests who witnessed the will would have objected to Miguel's insertion in this document of a threatened curse against his daughter if she meddled with his privilege to print the book. They argue (but this also seems a bit stretched) that "invocation of a curse was evidence of the practice of witchcraft" and that the three priests would have had a duty to report it to the Holy Office.<sup>53</sup> This, they

51. On Alcaraz in this period, see Aurelio Pretel Marín, *Alcaraz: un enclave castellano en la frontera del siglo XIII* (Albacete: Ed. Fuentes, 1974); see also his more recent study, *Alcaraz en el siglo de Andrés de Vandelvira*, already cited. See also José Cano Valero, "El siglo de las águilas alcaraceñas," *Al-Basit* 13 (1987), 11–42. On the similarities between Simón Abril's ideas about the use of the vernacular in the sciences and Sabuco's views, see Luis de Cañigral, "P. Simón Abril y M. Sabuco: Coincidencias programáticas en pedagogía y reforma de la enseñanza," *Al-Basit*, 13 (1987), 43–54.

52. Mary Ellen Waithe and Maria Elena Vintró, "Posthumously Plagiarizing Oliva Sabuco: An Appeal to Cataloging Librarians," in *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 35:3–4 (2003), 525–40; see also their previous article, "Fué Oliva o fué Miguel: el caso del Sabuco," *Boletín de Biblioteca Nacional de México* 1–2 (2002–03), 11–37. In the Introduction to their translation they do not discuss the authorship issue, referring the reader to the two articles quoted above for corroboration of their claim that Oliva was indeed the author of *Nueva Filosofía* (Introduction, in Sabuco, *New Philosophy of Human Nature*, 1).

53. Waithe and Vintró, "Posthumously Plagiarizing Oliva Sabuco," 533–35. They also point out that Miguel has the title of the book wrong, as he calls it "*Nueva Filosofía o norma*," and that he mentions another book that "was printed" (527: they quote the document in translation). They adopt the reading "*ymprymieron*" (past tense), while the other scholars who have examined the document, Henares and Rodríguez de la Torre, read "*ymprymieran*" (future tense). See Waithe's and Vintró's transcription of the document posted on their website [www.sabuco.org](http://www.sabuco.org), and n32 above for references to Henares's and Rodríguez de la Torre's transcription.

claim, is “new evidence” showing that the testament cannot be taken as final proof of Miguel’s authorship. They also point out that the *prima facie* evidence pointing to Oliva’s authorship has been too easily discounted. To obtain the royal license to print a book, an author had to appear in person before the representatives of the *Consejo Real* to explain what the book was about. Misrepresentation of either content or authorship would be a risky proceeding, as discovery of fraud entailed punishment. Moreover, Waithe and Vintró found some baptismal records showing that Oliva was still living in Alcaraz in 1596 and 1600, when she and her husband were godparents to some children. This, they point out, is evidence against the claim made by Octavio Cuartero that Oliva and her husband had to leave Alcaraz in disgrace, presumably once the fraud about the authorship became publicly known.<sup>54</sup> Finally, they argue on the basis of new documents that neither of the dates conventionally assumed for Miguel’s and Oliva’s deaths are correct. Miguel is mentioned in the 1602 wedding banns of his son Miguel (if he studied at Alcalá in the early 1540s, he would have been at least an octogenarian by then). As to Oliva, contrary to what is said in the preface to the 1622 Portuguese edition of *Nueva Filosofía*, she was still living in 1629, as indicated by the fact that she is mentioned in the marriage banns of her daughter Luisa de Buedo in that year.<sup>55</sup>

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In their article, Waithe and Vintró do not quote the scholars who have recently examined the archival documents, Henares, Rodríguez de la Torre, and Pretel Marín. They also point out that the promissory note by Alonso de Buedo transcribed by Marco Hidalgo shows that Alonso was aware that the trip to Portugal to print the book in Miguel’s name was a “fool’s errand,” because Oliva held the copyright also for Portugal. But in fact the promissory note as transcribed by Marco Hidalgo does not say that the book will be printed in Miguel’s name. In the testament, moreover, Miguel says that in all the books mentioned he gave and would give as author his daughter Oliva, thus showing that he had no intention of dropping the fictional authorship, though he felt entitled to the profits from the sale of the book.

54. See Octavio Cuartero, Prólogo, in Sabuco, *Obras*, xxv. He only suggested this as a possibility, due to “el mal éxito que tuvo en la Corte y en las escuelas la filosofía de Doña Oliva” and to some “molesta murmuración entre los vecinos de Alcaraz.”

55. Waithe and Vintró, “Posthumously Plagiarizing Oliva Sabuco,” 535–37. But both documents simply say that Miguel was the son of the Bachiller Sabuco, and that Luisa de Buedo was Oliva’s daughter; they do not say that they were still living at the time of the weddings. See the documents posted on their website [www.sabuco.org](http://www.sabuco.org).

None of this, however, does even remotely amount to conclusive proof of Oliva's authorship of *Nueva Filosofía*. Though Waithe and Vintró are quite right in pointing out that Oliva's authorship has been too easily discounted, and their research in the local archives has provided new and valuable documentation, their eagerness to attribute the work to Oliva seems, in the face of the evidence, a bit too much like wishful thinking.<sup>56</sup> I believe, as I have already said, that the mystery of the authorship of *Nueva Filosofía* has not been solved yet. On the side of Oliva's authorship, the question that looms largest in my mind is: if Oliva's authorship was a sham, why did none of the contemporaries see through it? As we know, Oliva became immediately famous as a woman prodigy. Indeed, the verses from the *Pícara Justina* that I quoted above, in listing her among fictional characters such as Don Quixote and Celestina, may have hinted at the fictive nature of her authorship<sup>57</sup>—the learned Oliva like the Dickensian Mrs. Harris. But as we know, Oliva was a real person, not a fictional character. If she was just an ordinary woman of little or no education, like most women of her time, how could her contemporaries so easily believe in her identity as a learned author? A woman of learning was a rarity but not an impossibility in sixteenth-century Spain; in fact, hundreds of women were writing in this period.<sup>58</sup> Oliva's contemporaries would

56. It is disconcerting, at the very least, that Waithe had already blithely reclaimed Oliva's authorship, with not a shred of new evidence at all, several years before her research with Vintró in the Alcaraz archives. See her chapter "Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera," in Waithe, *A History of Women Philosophers*, 2.261–84. Domingo Henares has scathingly criticized Waithe and Vintró's arguments in favor of Oliva's authorship: "Anotaciones al artículo Fue Oliva o fue Miguel? Reconsiderando el caso Sabuco," text posted on the website [www.sabuco.eu](http://www.sabuco.eu), website of the Forum Oliva Sabuco de Castilla-La Mancha y Sociedad Oliva Sabuco de España. Ricardo González, *El enigma Sabuco* (Albacete: Ricardo González, 2005) has come too late to my knowledge to be included in this discussion.

57. As suggested by Marcel Bataillon, *Pícaros y picaresca: La pícara Justina* (Madrid: Taurus, 1969), 43. Bataillon argued that the author of *Justina*, the Toledo physician Francisco López de Ubeda, must have known that Miguel Sabuco was the true author of the book: "Nuestro autor, contemporáneo del bachiller Miguel Sabuco y criado en la misma región de España, conocía, seguramente, el secreto de éste (sólo definitivamente revelado a principio del siglo XX) consistente en que Doña Oliva Sabuco no es sino el testafarro de su propio progenitor" (43, see also 172–73).

58. As shown long ago by Serrano y Sanz, *Apuntes para una biblioteca de escritoras españolas desde el año 1401 al 1833*. See also Ronald E. Surtz, *Writing Women in Late Medieval*



probably have heard of celebrated women humanists like Luisa Sigea (ca. 1522–60), Latin teacher to the *infanta* Mary of Portugal, and author of works in Latin.<sup>59</sup> *Nueva Filosofía* is prefaced by two sonnets in Oliva Sabuco's honor by a resident of Alcaraz, the *licenciado* Juan de Sotomayor, suggesting that this local scholar knew Oliva as a woman of learning. I have also come across a new piece of evidence in this respect, another piece of the puzzle that nobody seems to have noticed so far. Oliva was mentioned by a contemporary as an eminent learned woman even *before* her book came out. She was praised by Cristóbal de Acosta in his *Tratado en loor de las mugeres* (treatise in praise of women) published in Venice in 1592, but probably written several years earlier, in 1585.<sup>60</sup> Since this text, as far as I know, has never been mentioned by any of the historians who have written on Sabuco, I will quote the passage in full:

If the world, with so much reason, had not started to praise (...) the great learning of a living Spanish lady, Oliva Sabuco, a native of these kingdoms, I would not have mentioned her now, until the time when I hope to make her name for ever immortal, [that is] when I will send you—which will be soon—the book that this

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*and Early Modern Spain: The Mothers of Saint Teresa of Avila* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995). On women's literacy in early modern Spain see Nieves Baranda Leturio, *Cortejo a lo prohibido. Lectoras y escritoras en la España moderna* (Madrid: Editorial Arco/Libros, 2005), esp. 17–64.

59. She wrote a Latin dialogue, *Duarum Virginum Colloquium de Vita Aulica et Privata* (1552): see the critical edition with Introduction and French translation by Odette Sauvage: *Dialogue de deux jeunes filles sur la vie de cour et la vie de retraite* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970); Louis Bourdon and Odette Sauvage, "Recherches sur Luisa Sigea," *Bulletin des études portugaises* 31 (1970), 33–176 (which includes Sigea's correspondence with various people of her times, including Philip II). See also Inés Rada, "Profil et trajectoire d'une femme humaniste: Luisa Sigea" in *Images de la femme en Espagne aux XVIème et XVIIème siècles*, ed. Augustin Redondo (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne nouvelle, 1994), 339–49; and the monograph by Susanne Thiemann, *Vom Glück der Gelehrsamkeit. Luisa Sigea, Humanistin im 16. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006).

60. Cristóbal de Acosta, *Tratado en loor de las mugeres, y de la Castidad, Onestidad, Constancia, Silencio, y Justicia: con otras muchas particularidades, y varias Historias* (Venice: Giacomo Cornetti, 1592).

learned woman is writing on the new philosophy and nature of man, and on the true medicine. In which you will find—those of you who will read it with attention and without prejudice—all the philosophy and medicine, of the ancients and the moderns, renewed with great cleverness, wisdom and many demonstrations.<sup>61</sup>

As this passage clearly implies, Acosta was writing before *Nueva Filosofía* was published (internal evidence in the book suggests that he wrote the *Tratado en loor de las mugeres* in 1585, two years before *Nueva Filosofía* came out).<sup>62</sup> What do we know of Acosta himself? He was of African origin (“Affricano” is the sobriquet proudly displayed after his name on the title page of his work), probably born of Marrano-Jewish parents. Early in life he moved to Portugal, went to India as a physician to the Portuguese Viceroy Luiz de Ataíde in 1568, came back to Lisbon, and served as town physician and surgeon to the municipality of Burgos in Spain from 1576 to 1587.<sup>63</sup> His most famous

61. Cristóbal de Acosta, *Tratado en loor de las mugeres*, 106v–107r: “Y si el mundo con tanta razon no empesara (loque en quanto durar no dexara) de loar el gran saber de una donna Oliva Sabuco dama Española, natural desto Reynos, que oy vive callara yo su nombre de presente hasta el tiempo que lo espero eternizar, quando os embiare (que sa presto) el libro que esta sabia muger compone dela nueva filosofia y naturaleza del hombre, y dela verdadera medicina. En el qual vereis (vos y quien con consideracion y sin pasion lo leyere) con mucha agudeza, prudencia y nomenos demonstraciones revovada toda la filosofia y medicina, de todos los antigos [sic!] y modernos.”

The passage is quoted, but without analyzing its implications for the authorship of *Nueva Filosofía*, by Ana Vargas Martínez, “La autoridad femenina en Cristóbal Acosta: una cuestión de orden simbólico,” in *De los símbolos al orden simbólico femenino* (ss. IV–XVII), ed. Ana Isabel Cerrada Jiménez and Josemi Lorenzo Arribas (Madrid: Asociación Cultural Al-Mudayna, 1998), 100.

62. A prefatory letter to the volume bears the date 12 August 1585 (Acosta, *Tratado en loor de las mugeres*, 12r).

63. After 1587, upon the death of his wife, Acosta withdrew to a hermitage, and there he wrote a *Tratado en contra, y pro de la vita solitaria*, also published in Venice by Giacomo Cornetti in 1592, like his *Tratado en loor de las mugeres*. On Acosta see Antonio Hernández Morejón, *Historia Bibliográfica de la Medicina Española* (New York and London: Johnson Reprints, 1967), 3.265–67; and H. Friedenwald, *The Jews and Medicine* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1944), 2.445; see also the entry “Acosta, Cristóbal” by Francisco

work is a treatise on Eastern *materia medica*, *Tractado de las drogas y medicinas de las Indias Orientales* (Burgos, 1578)<sup>64</sup> which is quoted several times in *Nueva Filosofía*.<sup>65</sup>

The connection with Acosta leads us to the issue of the intellectual context of *Nueva Filosofía*. Where did some of the ideas advocated by Sabuco come from? Very sparing and often critical in mentioning ancient authorities, the texts collected in *Nueva Filosofía* quote frequently and with marked approbation, by contrast, one specific category of works—the books on *materia medica* written by overseas travelers and explorers, as for instance, besides Acosta himself, Nicolás Monardes's *Historia medicinal de las cosas que se traen de nuestras Indias Occidentales* (Seville, 1565)<sup>66</sup> and other works on the *materia medica* of the new world. Sabuco distinctly mentions new drugs imported from the Americas, such as the china root, and other herbal remedies.<sup>67</sup> Sabuco's keen interest in the new exotic pharmacopoeia fits well with his/her appreciation of Pliny's *Natural*

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Guerra in *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, ed. Charles C. Gillespie (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970–1990), s.v. Interesting notes about Acosta's work on drugs can be found in Francisco Guerra, "Sexo y drogas en el siglo XVI," *Asclepio* 24 (1972), 304–11.

64. The work was translated into Latin by Charles de l'Écluse: *Aromatum et medicamentorum in orientali India nascentium Liber* (Antwerp: Christophe Plantin, 1582). An Italian edition was published in 1585 in Venice: *Trattato di Christoforo Acosta Africano, medico, & chirurgo della Historia, Natura, et Virtù delle Droghe medicinali, & altri semplici rarissimi, che vengono portati dalle Indie orientali in Europa* (Venice: Francesco Ziletti, 1585). See Raúl Rodríguez Nozal and Antonio González Bueno, *El Tratado de las drogas de Cristóbal de Acosta (Burgos, 1578). Utilidad commercial y materia médica de las Indias orientales en la Europa renacentista* (Madrid: Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 2000).

65. Sabuco, *Obras*, 43, 107, 222.

66. Nicolás Monardes (ca. 1512–88), *La historia medicinal de las cosas que se traen de nuestras Indias occidentales*, facsimile reprint of the 1580 edition, intro. José María López Piñero (Madrid: Ministerio de Sanidad y Consumo, 1989). Sabuco quotes Monardes approvingly several times in the *Coloquio de auxilios, o remedios de la vera medicina* (*Obras*, 219, 222).

67. Such as "las habas purgantes, el palo para males de riñones, el pimiento de Indias y los piñones de Indias" (see Francés Causapé, "Miguel Sabuco Álvarez y la farmacia," 109). On Spain's role in the introduction of exotic *materia medica* to Europe see José María López Piñero and M. L. López Terrada, *La influencia española en la introducción en Europa de las plantas americanas, 1463–1623* (Valencia: Universidad de Valencia, 1998).