

# The place of languages in the idea of erudition and false erudition in *El Gallo Pitagórico*.

El lugar de las lenguas en la idea de erudición y falsa erudición en *El Gallo Pitagórico*.

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## Abstract:

This article analyses the role of languages in the representation of scholarship and false scholarship in *El Gallo Pitagórico* (1842–1844), a satirical work by Juan Bautista Morales. The study is based on the premise that, in the Enlightenment context, knowledge of classical and modern languages was a distinctive feature of the scholar, although also a possible source of intellectual vanity. The aim of the work is to examine how Morales reproduces and, at the same time, criticises the linguistic uses associated with the figure of the enlightened man. The analysis focuses on three dimensions: the use of foreign languages, explicit references to the study or knowledge of languages, and comments on translation. Through textual analysis, fragments written in languages other than Spanish, references to classical and modern authors, and mentions of translation work and language learning are identified. It concludes, on the one hand, that *El Gallo Pitagórico* articulates the value of knowledge in languages, while criticising its ostentation and, on the other hand,

that the abundant presence of texts in various languages throughout the work can be described precisely as an example of ostentation.

**Keywords:** Enlightened erudition. False erudition. Foreign languages. El Gallo Pitagórico.

**Resumen:**

Este artículo analiza el papel de las lenguas en la representación de la erudición y la falsa erudición en *El Gallo Pitagórico* (1842–1844), obra satírica de Juan Bautista Morales. El estudio parte del planteamiento de que, en el contexto ilustrado, el conocimiento de lenguas clásicas y modernas era un rasgo distintivo del erudito, aunque también una posible fuente de vanidad intelectual. El objetivo del trabajo es examinar cómo Morales reproduce y, al mismo tiempo, critica los usos lingüísticos asociados a la figura del hombre ilustrado. El análisis se centra en tres dimensiones: el uso de lenguas extranjeras, las menciones explícitas al estudio o conocimiento de idiomas, y los comentarios sobre traducción. A través de un análisis textual, se identifican los fragmentos escritos en lenguas distintas al español, las referencias a autores clásicos y modernos, así como menciones de la labor traductora y del aprendizaje de lenguas. Se concluye, por un lado, que *El Gallo Pitagórico* articula el valor de los saberes en lenguas, mientras se expone una crítica a su ostentación y, por otro lado, la abundante presencia de textos en diversas lenguas a lo largo de la obra puede calificarse precisamente como un ejemplo de ostentación.

**Palabras clave:** Erudición ilustrada. Falsa erudición. Extranjeras. El Gallo Pitagórico.

## Introduction.

In the context of the intellectual transformations in 19th-century Mexico inherited from the Enlightenment, the figure of the enlightened scholar emerged as a symbol of knowledge in languages, literature and history worthy of recognition, but at the same time as an object of suspicion of ostentation. In this contradictory framework, satire allowed authors of the time to explore the tensions between knowledge and its presumption (Insúa, 2011). One of the Mexican works representative of this content is *El Gallo Pitagórico*, a satire written by the Guanajuato journalist and politician Juan Bautista Morales, published in instalments in the newspaper *El Siglo Diez y Nueve* between 1842 and 1844 and later, in 1845, presented by Ignacio Cumplido's printing press in book format accompanied by lithographs and a poem by Guillermo Prieto. In 1857, Cumplido himself published a new edition that he presented as corrected and accompanied by a biographical note on Morales written by Francisco Zarco. This latest edition is the one used in the present study.

ned Morales literary fame for his scathing criticism of Santa Anna's government and Mexican society of his time. Considered a moralistic writer, Juan Bautista Morales presents in *El Gallo*

Pitagórico a dialogue between a man, Erasmo Luján, and a rooster inhabited by the soul of Pythagoras. The work, peppered with fragments in English, French, Italian and Latin, contains numerous criticisms and mockeries of various aspects of government and society, but also reflections on concepts such as virtues, erudition (and false erudition), the arts and the press itself. Studying this work allows us to observe literary and journalistic functions in a space shared by the culture and politics of the time.

In this context, this study proposes to analyse the place of languages, both classical and modern, in the discourse on erudition by reviewing the contents of *El Gallo Pitagórico* in which languages other than Spanish are used and in which the mastery of foreign languages is discussed as an essential part of the enlightened erudition to which the intellectual circles of the time aspired. The aim of this review is to discuss how the satire and reflection on languages present in *El Gallo Pitagórico* shape an idea of enlightened scholarship. To this end, the analysis of the publication will address issues such as: which languages are used and mentioned, which texts are translated, what opinions are expressed about them and about the work of translation, and how such opinions are expressed.

### Erudition and false enlightened erudition

The concept of the learned man has its immediate antecedent in that of the man of letters, which can be traced back to at least two works that were widely circulated in their time: *Dell'uomo di lettere difeso ed emendato* by Daniello Bartoli (1645) and *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* by Baltasar Gracián (1648). Bartoli, a Jesuit priest, defends the figure of the intellectual or man of letters as someone who cultivates knowledge and practises Christian virtues, vindicating the importance of knowledge as something useful and noble and rejecting vanity and arrogance. However, the author points out the common flaws in intellectuals: pride, pedantry and a desire for recognition (although he regrets that knowledge is no longer valued as it was in ancient times), and therefore proposes combining erudition with humility, wisdom with charity and study with spiritual life.

For his part, Gracián, also a Jesuit priest, argues that the sources of erudition are sacred and human history; the maxims and sayings of wise men, taken from moral philosophy and poetry: heroic sayings, adages and proverbs, as well as paradoxes, riddles and stories. But he warns against abuse and the excesses typical of buffoons and recommends prudence and sobriety.

Although the contemporary concept of scholarship describes instruction in science and the arts that leads to broad knowledge, the enlightened thinking reflected in the French Encyclopaedia of 1751 separates scientific knowledge from that of the fine arts, applying the notion of scholarship solely to the areas of history, languages and books, with a scholar being someone who possesses extensive knowledge in all three. The scholar's conceptual approach clearly questions the true and false paths and motivations for cultivating the intellect. Like Gracián and Bartoli, the French Encyclopaedia sets out some oppositions, of which we highlight those relating to languages: in the preliminary discourse, it is noted that those who wish to study the discoveries of their predecessors will need to master seven or eight languages, the study of which would take so much time that one could die without beginning the real learning process. In other words, it is considered characteristic of the scholar to know languages, but the effort of learning them prevents one from spending time studying the wealth of knowledge they convey. On the other hand, the encyclopaedists in the same work warned that reading translations can never replace reading the texts in their original language due to the numerous examples of textual infidelities committed by translators, although they recognise the work of translators and its difficulty, and even recommend it as a formative exercise for young people.

Insúa (2011) points out that the ideas of both men of letters and scholars adopted by the Enlightenment thinkers imply a need to communicate knowledge to wide circles in search of readers who will buy their works, since, unlike the scholars of earlier times (linked to the nobility and the Church), the Enlightenment thinkers often depended economically on their intellectual activity. This change, together with the greater circulation of publications, provoked criticism and warnings about literary activity being primarily a commercial enterprise, and accusations of false erudition became more frequent.

One of the best-known texts criticising this apparent scholarship is Feijoo's *Teatro crítico universal* (1728), in which he argues that the reason why many ignorant people pass themselves off as scholars is that the people are poor judges of merit and tend to give authority to the illiterate who feign arrogance and artificial gestures. Feijoo points out that true scholars are modest and shy, as they distrust themselves, understanding that there is much more that is unknown than known, while false scholars are overconfident and steer conversations towards topics they can barely talk (or write) about in order to appear wiser than others.

Among the most important satirical texts on scholarship in the 18th century is the one published in 1772 by the Spaniard José de Cadalso, entitled *Los eruditos a la violeta o Curso completo de todas las ciencias dividido en siete lecciones para los siete días de la semana* (Scholars in the Violet or Complete Course of All Sciences Divided into Seven Lessons for the Seven Days of the Week), a gift for those who claim to know a lot by studying little. In this text, in addition to condemning pride, arrogance and the use of knowledge to show off in social settings, the author devotes a few lines to exploring the role of languages in this vain erudition. Initially, Cadalso acknowledges that language training plays an important role in education and that applying oneself seriously to its study requires a great deal of time, four lifetimes, as he humorously points out. However, he proceeds with the ironic tone characteristic of the work to recommend to the reader:

It is enough to know just enough French to read a few little books that seem to be nothing but sugar, marzipan and caramel. Of Italian, enough to understand the arias sung by some lady. Of English, say that it is the language of birds; that it has few rules; that they usually put the genitive, dative and ablative endings at the end of the sentence; that in their poems they split their words in half, when necessary, like a bricklayer splits a brick to fit it into the wall. Say that German is a very rough language, but praise its antiquity. [...] They will consider you a general interpreter, and you will have all the votes, with no dissent, to be archivists of the Tower of Babel (p. 60).

Another important satire on false erudition can be found in the work of another Spaniard, Tomás de Iriarte, *Los literatos en cuaresma*, published in 1773. In it, Iriarte presents the dialogues between literary friends who meet to discuss, in the manner of an academy, every Sunday during Lent. The author speaks of apprentices of literature and masters of pedantry to criticise the vices and excesses of pedants, imitators who write without knowing or understanding what they read.

### Brief context of *El Gallo Pitagórico*

The idea of the enlightened sage permeated the intellectual scene of the then young Mexican state in the 19th century, with constant references to the opposition between apparent wisdom and true wisdom, between superfluous motives for the cultivation of knowledge and genuine ones, so that numerous sources of the time show criticism of what they point out as hypocrisy in the ' ' knowledge or popular deception with pretence and obscurity of discourse. Weber (2019) indicates that



prejudices and caricatures of the figure of the scholar describe him as an amateur, a collector of more or less useless facts that he interprets partially and always eager for recognition and to be a participant in progress.

If such accusations were numerous, it was because, as Suárez de la Torre (2005) explains, in the heat of the ideological struggles of the first decades of independence, there was a proliferation of publications that sought to disseminate ideas and invite reflection in order to defend or contradict ideas, personalities and actions. In 19th-century Mexico, it was considered the duty of the press to enlighten readers, bringing them closer to works of philosophy, history, theatre, and the arts, as well as local political events. In addition, in academies and any type of gathering for the socialisation of knowledge, readings aloud and dialogue were common, representing another setting for the display of knowledge, whether abundant and profound or limited and superficial.

In the Mexican background of *El Gallo Pitagórico*, Fernández de Lizardi is one of the authors who wrote most critically about false erudition. Lizardi's literature points out that the ignorant person talks a lot to appear wise, making use of gestures, appearances and empty speeches. In his fables, Lizardi uses animal characters to characterise the display of knowledge that is clearly lacking. Meanwhile, in his novels, especially *El Periquillo Sarniento*, *El Catrín y la Quijotita y su prima*, there are abundant references to false erudition, with criticism of the concern for the way of speaking, of showing off wisdom in order to claim the status of a scholar (Insúa, 2011).

Among the myriad of publications that saw the light of day in the first decades of independent life, *El Siglo XIX*, founded by Ignacio Cumplido and Juan Bautista Morales in 1841, would be the most representative of the liberal Mexican newspapers thanks to the collaboration of renowned politicians and men of letters. Juan Bautista Morales Olavarrieta (1788-1856), as Bonilla Reyna (2019) notes, was a Creole from a poor family born in Guanajuato. The family later moved to Mexico City, where Morales studied law at the Colegio de San Ildefonso. From the 1820s onwards, according to Francisco Zarco (1857), he devoted himself to journalism and at the same time positioned himself among the political elite, serving as a legislator at various times, governor of his home state and twice as president of the Supreme Court of Justice. Morales was in favour of the republic and federalism and opposed Iturbide and Santa Anna. In his work as editor and contributor to various publications of the time, Morales spoke out on foreign policy issues such as the war with France and the separation of

Texas, but also on domestic policy issues such as the conflicts between federalism and centralism, and even religious and moral issues (Hernández del Ángel, 2022).

It was during the last years of Santa Anna's government that Morales published, between January 1842 and September 1844, a series of satirical articles in the newspaper *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, which would later form *El Gallo Pitagórico*, a work that Ozuna Castañeda (2018) places between political contingency and literary discourse as prose of ideas. Satire, as Ozuna Castañeda (2018) points out, is a genre of Latin invention that uses humour to point out vices and propose corrections and transformations of reality. The author points out that satires such as *El Gallo Pitagórico* are part of the Lucianic tradition (named after Lucian of Samosata, translated by Erasmus of Rotterdam) in which a mixture of comedy and dialogue between absurd characters and in improbable contexts is presented with the aim of referring to facts of social reality. Examples of this tradition can be found in authors such as Cervantes, Francisco de Quevedo, Cadalso, Feijoo, Voltaire, among others, and in the Mexican press prior to Morales, in Fernández de Lizardi.

*El Gallo Pitagórico* presents, within the structure of colloquial dialogue, narratives of travels, theatre performances, trials, and comedies, all peppered with references, quotations, or imitations of works in Latin, as well as Spanish, French, Italian, and English works, even making use of words or expressions in those languages. These traces of literary knowledge and classical and modern languages, together with the satirical work's purpose of pointing out and correcting, reveal that Morales exhibits characteristics typical of an enlightened scholar.

Below, we present, on the one hand, the uses of languages other than Spanish and, on the other, references to languages and, finally, references to translation in *El Gallo Pitagórico*. A review of this content allows us to observe the contrasts between erudition and false erudition that surround the enlightened concept of a man of letters who has access to literature in classical or modern foreign languages and practises writing or translation.

### Use of languages other than Spanish

Bautista Morales' work is peppered with fragments written in English, French, Italian and Latin, as illustrated in **Table 1**. These fragments range from isolated uses of loanwords in modern foreign languages, such as *sansculottes*, *deshabillé*, *sottovoce*; relatively common Latin expressions in cultured speech, such as *hoc est*, *plusquam*, *quid pro quo*, *sine qua non*; to multiple lines of verse in

a foreign language presented without translation into Spanish, such as 16 lines taken from an octave of Ariosto's Orlando Furioso.

**Table 1.** Languages other than Spanish present in El Gallo Pitagórico

Language	Number of fragments	Authors cited
Latin	96	Horace, Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, Cicero, Aristotle, Lucan
Italian	18	Ariosto, Pietro Metastasio, Gian Battista Guarini, Giovanni Battista Casti, Dante Alighieri
French	14	Nicolas Boileau, Corneille, Crébillon
English	2	N/A

Source: Own work

The language most commonly used in El Gallo Pitagórico is Latin, with 96 fragments in this language, including quotations from Aristotle, Horace, Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, Cicero and Lucan. Bautista Morales presents the transcription of verses in Latin, most of which are not accompanied by translations or explanations of their meaning and vary in length from two to eight lines. The next most widely used language is Italian, with 18 fragments, including, as mentioned above, Ariosto, Dante and the poets and playwrights Pietro Metastasio, Gian Battista Guarini and Giovanni Battista Casti. Italian is followed by French, with 14 fragments and quotations from Nicolas Boileau's *Lutrin*, Corneille's *La mort de Pompée* and Catherine de Crébillon. Finally, the use of English is limited to three fragments (very well, yes and dollar) without any quotations or mentions of authors.

This frequent use of foreign languages and quotations from great European authors serves as a display of Juan Bautista Morales' own attributes, characterising him as a scholar according to the enlightened definition inherited from the French encyclopaedists, ' ' as he displays his knowledge of languages and literature while discussing recent historical and political events.

### Discourse on languages



On three occasions in the edition of *El Gallo Pitagórico* under study, mention is made of the study of a language, whether classical or modern, either to point out such activity as praiseworthy or to ironise about the vacuity of those who boast about their knowledge.

The biographical note on Bautista Morales, signed by Francisco Zarco, highlights the characteristics traditionally associated with men of letters, including knowledge of Latin, noting that the author "[...] studied eagerly, prepared lectures for his friends, explained the most difficult subjects to them, and spent his free time improvising verses, in Castilian or Latin, and running, so to speak, a small academy of belles-lettres" (p. 11).

In contrast, the other two references are criticisms of his manner of expression, which adopts unnecessary and sometimes misunderstood foreign words in order to appear erudite. On two occasions, the use of French alongside Spanish is criticised, declaring it nonsense: "No, son, I am not so far from the hand of God that I like this jumble of nonsense, half written in a language that seems to be French and half in a language that does not seem to be Spanish" (p. 76). "There is no educated man who does not speak or write half in French and half in Spanish, and there has even been a writer in Mexico who, in a truly ideological discourse, defends that such a way of expressing oneself is very good" (p. 368).

As early as the 17th century, Baltasar Gracián criticised those who, for the sake of showing off, mixed languages in a single speech. And in the 18th century, Iriarte accused those who used terms from other languages when expressing themselves in Spanish of lacking reflection and of vanity in showing off their knowledge of a foreign language. For his part, Pedro Centeno, in his satire *Don Quijote el Escolástico* (1788), warns:

I cannot recommend highly enough a translation in which French, Italian and a smattering of Spanish are spoken at the same time, which could perhaps be called a trilingual translation with even more justification than the school in I don't know where. Eh la chose nunca jamás veduta! (p. 51).

In another case, without missing the opportunity to mock those who know a little French, it is the use of formal language that Morales points out as ridiculous:

[...] inner self-importance is reduced to knowing a little Latin and French, even if one does not know a word of Spanish. A doctor of high standing must rather have his tongue torn out with

red-hot pincers than pronounce the words chest, belly, spine, foot bath, examination of the corpse, but rather these: sternum, abdomen, pineal gland, foot bath, autopsy, etc. (p. 124).

Moro Martín (2019) understands this ridicule as pointing out an extravagance that makes the scholar appear pathetic, and probably has its first example in Don Quixote, who speaks in an unnecessarily formal register in order to fit in with his imaginary context as a knight.

### Discourse on translation

Translation, as discussed above, is described by encyclopaedists as an important activity for intellectual development, while reading translations is seen as a second-rate activity, with reading the original texts being preferred. In the context of the 19th-century Mexican press, although publications sought to promote the development of national literature, the role of translation was viewed positively, both for the value of the translated content and for the intellectual stimulation of the work of translation itself, as evidenced by some notes in the literary newspaper *El Álbum Mexicano*: "We believe we are doing our subscribers a favour by translating these pages" (Cumplido, 1849, p. 292), "We are delighted to include this translation, both because the subject matter is quite interesting and because we believe it can serve as a stimulus for the literary works of our fair sex" (Cumplido, 1849, p. 396). Furthermore, like the encyclopaedists of previous decades, editors tended to consider translation as an exercise that should be practised from a young age, as expressed in *El Monitor Republicano*: "We believe that it is very commendable for young people to devote their leisure time to this type of literary work" (García, 1848).

The contents of *El Gallo Pitagórico* include eleven references to translation work and, unlike the discourse on language knowledge, there are both critical and positive comments. The references reflect the trends in the Mexican press of the period and the positions of the encyclopaedists, as the criticism tends to focus on the poor quality of the translations, which reflect a poor understanding of the original texts, the result of which is to highlight a pretence of erudition on the part of those who translate poorly. However, in addition to the criticism, we find translated fragments, with due credit to their translators, as well as a couple of comments praising the ability to translate. The commentary begins with the positive mentions.

The first two mentions of translation in the text are found in the biographical note, where Zarco discusses Morales's skills in reading foreign languages and translating into Spanish: 'He also produced several versions from Latin, French, English, Italian and Portuguese. It is difficult to judge such a large number of works, and the critic feels daunted by the writer's prolific output' (p. 41). And "he professed the principles of Ferrier, whose work he translated and even had studied in schools" (p. 41).

Recognising the usefulness of translation, as we have said, is a frequent gesture in Enlightenment thought. Suffice it to recall that the French encyclopaedists recognised the Enlightenment duty to transmit universal ideas by bringing them into the French language. In the Spanish tradition, we find, for example, Tomás de Iriarte, who in *Los literatos en cuaresma* (1773) defends the work of translation, pointing out that it is applauded by those who "know how much a good translation costs, how useful it is, and how many great men of all nations have employed their ingenuity in translating" (p. 48), but not by those who believe that it is an easy activity and that "it should only be done by writers incapable of inventing" (p. 48).

In three instances throughout *El Gallo Pitagórico*, the work of translators of classical texts is mentioned: on two occasions, a quotation in Latin is presented, followed by its translation and the name of the translator, while on the third occasion, only the translation (with a couple of modifications made by Morales) and the name of the translator "D. José Cadalso translated it this way" (p. 296).

These words separate the original verses attributed to Virgil, interpreted as a criticism of the exploitation of others' labour, from their translation into Spanish by José Cadalso. The quotation and its translation are placed in the context of Morales' criticism of foreigners who profitably engage in business in Mexico and of Mexicans who, in the author's opinion, work to give all the profits to foreigners. Cadalso's translation was published in the supplement to the paper entitled *Los eruditos a la violeta* (1772). It is important to note that, as indicated by the title of Cadalso's publication, this is a supplement to a satirical work published by the author in the same year and discussed above. This quotation shows that Juan Bautista Morales read not only Cadalso's Supplement, but also *Los eruditos a la violeta*, since the theme and tone of his mockery of the false scholars of his time is shared by the Mexican author.

The words "as translated by Don Tomás de Iriarte" (p. 563) separate some verses in Latin by Horace, taken from the work *Ars Poetica* and its translation into Spanish by de Iriarte, published in Spain in 1777. This is the second case of a textual quotation that includes the original, the translation and the credit to the translator. The dialogue between El Gallo and Erasmo in this case is about theatre, and El Gallo uses the quotation to criticise the poor choice of actors to play characters that do not suit their physical appearance.

It should be noted that Morales quotes Iriarte several times in *El Gallo Pitagórico*, and it is interesting to point out that Iriarte, like Cadalso, wrote satire to criticise the scholars of his time. This observation allows us to reconstruct, at least partially, the satirical readings that inspired Morales to write and publish his own.

On the other hand, we find some verses in Spanish from the beginning of the second book of the *Aeneid*: "With what words can I paint such a pitiful picture? I remember now. I will begin with the translation by D Gregorio Hernández de Velasco of the second book of Virgil's *Aeneid*" (p. 596). The presence of the translation and the mention of the translator seem to be only a pretext to surround the dialogue between El Gallo and Erasmo regarding the exile of Antonio López de Santa Anna, one of the most recurrent objects of criticism in the publication, with characteristics of a scholar. Morales intervenes in the translation and has Gallo say "as the gold of Mexico and its people destroyed the great fury of that vile band," where the original says "as the gold, kingdom, and people of Troy destroyed the great fury of the Greek band" in order to proceed to recount Santa Anna's abandonment of the country.

This last mention of translation serves our analysis to complete a panorama of Morales' readings, which repeatedly reveal his knowledge of classical works. As Payás (2013) points out, these types of translations are part of a Mexican identity discourse that seeks to affirm continuity with the classical worlds while establishing links between the new nation and modern nations by demonstrating knowledge of contemporary European literature.

On the contrary, in the presentation of *El Gallo pitagórico*, in the context of a dialogue between a journalist and a friend of his who wants to get started in journalism, Morales ironises about the possibility of practising such a profession without education: "You have devoted yourself to nothing but reading novels, usually immoral and poorly translated into Spanish, which instead of

providing any instruction, only serve to corrupt the heart and the language" (pp. 56-57). As well as in:

[...] I cannot help but know something about translating French, for by dint of reading without understanding the newspapers in that language at the ministry, I have acquired an intellectual habit, so that I am not ignorant of most of what they say [...] I also cannot help but be ignorant of the translation of many pieces of Italian operas, even of the most difficult words, such as: *il mio core*, which means my heart; *buona notte*, good night; *mi sento morire*, I feel myself dying, etc. (p. 57).

Reading bad translations and translating poorly are constants in the discourse that opposes false erudition to genuine erudition, as we see again in the following sentence: "Oh! If the girl translates something from French and writes a few verses, then she is the prodigy of prodigies!" (p. 153).

The poor education of women is the subject of the sentence in which Morales ironically describes perfect instruction. Poorly undertaken studies and their results are also frequent in texts dealing with false erudition. An example of this can be found in *Don Quijote el escolástico* (1788), by the Spaniard Pedro Centeno, in which he states: "In studies [...] what is taught is how to make idiots stupid (Centeno, 1788, p. 64)".

Finally, we find the phrase: "Because, as taught by Boileau, *J'appelle un chat, un chat, et Rollet un fripon*, which translated into our language means: I call a cat a cat. And so-and-so a scoundrel" (p. 173). Beyond contributing to a discourse on translation, this last quote is yet another example of Morales' readings, since Nicolas Boileau, like other authors revealed in his quotes, was a writer of satires who criticised literary tastes above all else. Mentioning the French author by presenting such an irrelevant French phrase could well allow us to classify the discourse as false erudition, which is precisely what Morales intends to point out.

## Conclusion

The content analysis of *El Gallo Pitagórico* in terms of language use, discourse on language knowledge and translation highlights Juan Bautista Morales' ambiguous stance towards the figure of the enlightened scholar. On the one hand, the abundance of untranslated quotations and the sometimes



unnecessary use of foreign language expressions reinforce the image of an educated man who has access to good literary works, which aligns him with the enlightened ideal of access to original texts. On the other hand, the author unabashedly expresses his criticism, ridiculing the excesses of superficial erudition, characterised by the pretentious use of foreign words. This ambiguity between the celebration of knowledge and the ridicule of its vain ostentation places El Gallo Pitagórico in the satirical tradition that seeks to point out false erudition and vindicate the value of genuine interest in knowledge. However, in this ambiguous stance, the analysis shows that Bautista Morales repeatedly commits the error he seeks to point out, that is, he becomes a mirror of the excesses in the ostentation of his own knowledge.

The final reflections of this study align with Payás's (2013) idea of showing that translation (and the discourse surrounding it and language proficiency) has great representational power. This power is used by intellectuals, in this case by Morales, to assert their membership of the scholarly elites who had access to knowledge of the classical world and modern Europe, while defending claims to the identity of the then young Mexican nation.

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