Pérez, Antonio (1540–1611). Antonio was publicly the son of King Felipe II’s secretary, the priest Gonzalo Pérez, although he may really have been the son of a court noble; he was probably of Semitic ancestry, as were many thinkers and administrators in sixteenth-century Spain. Antonio was well-educated, especially at the universities of Venice and Padua, and was further tutored by Gonzalo for a career in government. He succeeded Gonzalo in the powerful position of royal secretary, and was especially charged with Italian affairs. His hobby was perfumery, and he is also remembered for advances in dental hygiene.

The victim of conservative courtiers, Pérez was arrested on charges of murder and heresy; charges of sodomy were later added. He escaped from prison and fled to Aragón, terrifying the king because of Pérez’s possession of documents containing official secrets, probably assassinations. After popular demonstrations prevented the king from immediately recapturing Pérez, he fled to France. His wife and children, whom he was never to see again, were kept as hostages in Madrid to ensure that he did not reveal secrets. In exile in France and England, surviving assassination attempts, Pérez wrote and published on Spain, beginning the long tradition of study of Spain’s problems. His works have had considerable influence on Spanish reformist and anti-clerical thinking.

The testimony of the witnesses against Pérez, which has been published only in heavily censored form, speaks of a homosexual underworld among the
Spanish nobility. Pérez’s cousin Juan de Tovar, also implicated in the scandal and one of the witnesses, is presumably the same Juan de Tovar who composed the first known work in Spanish in which homosexual love is presented positively. This is a lengthy Eclogue first published, minus a page torn from the MS, in 1985. In it, a boy dies rather than reveal the identity of the man he loves.

Daniel Eisenberg