

Cortez, Enrique E. *Biografía y polémica: El Inca Garcilaso y el archivo colonial andino en el siglo XIX*. Madrid, beroamericana, 2018, 344 pp. ISBN: 978-84-16922-80-2.

Stephen McNabb
Northwestern University
stephenmcnabb2023@u.northwestern.edu

In *Biografía y polémica*, Enrique E. Cortez sets out an investigation into the reception and authority of El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega to examine his categorical shift between historian and novelist that developed throughout the long nineteenth century (1780-1930). Rather than returning to Garcilaso's *Los comentarios reales* to offer a new analysis of the text itself, Cortez presents a historical approach to Garcilaso's global reception through a critical lens that reimagines the colonial archive as a porous cultural object seminal in the

creation of the mestizo subject and modern Peruvian identity. By focusing on the historical and textual strategies nineteenth century historians used to include or exclude Garcilaso from a position of historical or literary authority through questioning the politics of archival composition, Cortez shines a new light on the crossroads between the meeting points of European and indigenous forms of historical knowledge and historiography.

In part one, Cortez situates the archive under a Foucauldian definition as a subjective place of enunciation whose materiality is not as textually restricted as previous scholarship argues. Weaving together conceptions of the archive by Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida with definitions of colonial archive set out by Roberto Gonzalez Echevarría, Diane Taylor, and others, Cortez sees the colonial archive as a formation of cultural discourses and materiality whose composition speaks towards the politics of the archivist. While the archive itself is a colonial product that leans toward imperial tendencies, Cortez argues that Garcilaso utilized the colonial archive as a means for the inclusion of indigenous Andean discourse and historical knowledge. By allowing for an inclusion of non-Hispanic discourse into the body of colonial archive, *Biografía y polémica* argues that the colonial archive is divided into three distinct historical and cultural categories: imperial, criolla, and indigenous. Cortez outlines the necessity of all three archival tendencies to lend an image of the tense relationships that constitute the colonial archive as a dynamic site of cultural production.

After situating the driving theoretical frameworks, *Biografía y polémica* shifts to Boston where American historians William Prescott and George Ticknor cast doubt on Garcilaso's historical authority, while simultaneously recognizing the merit and value of his writings. These figures attempted to reclassify *Los comentarios reales* as a work of literature rather than history, displacing Garcilaso from the position of historian to utopian writer of an indigenous imagination. Yet as Cortez poignantly details, such doubts are

hardly convincing. Assaulting the intellectual capacity of indigenous people and the importance of their cultural objects, North American historians were unable to recognize Garcilaso's political potential within Peru. While Prescott saw within Garcilaso "graces of composition" (110) and understood the text's cultural value, Ticknor took a harsher stance against the mestizo author and saw within him little historical or literary value. However, Cortez rationalizes that Ticknor completed Prescott's reclassification of Garcilaso as a literary figure by emphasizing his use of what he interpreted as an irrational indigenous imagination. To say that by arguing that Garcilaso wrote utopic historical fabulations, Ticknor, paradoxically, made a case for Garcilaso's cultural and literary value.

The book's focus then travels across the Atlantic to consider how Spanish historian Marcelino Menendez Pelayo understood Garcilaso as a cultural and literary bridge between the Iberian Peninsula and Peru through the development of a Spanish-American discourse enabled through Garcilaso's mestizo identity and European education. Through the writing of Menendez Pelayo, Cortez acknowledges that Garcilaso's displacement from the Hispanic tradition and entrance into the category of an emerging American literature places a renewed emphasis on his mestizo identity and the role of indigeneity in the writing of colonial history. While Prescott and Ticknor considered mestizaje to be a debilitating factor in establishing Garcilaso's reputation as a writer, Menendez Pelayo approached the author's mestizo identity as a creative conflict that wove history and literature together where *Los comentarios reales* can be classified as a utopic novel in the tradition of Thomas More. As Cortez explains, this utopic classification began the slow recuperation of Garcilaso's reputation and authenticity by emphasizing his Hispanic roots and arguing that his mestizo identity broadened the scope of Hispanic literature to incorporate colonial writings as a new beginning for Spanish imperialism across the Americas. While Menendez Pelayo attempted to elevate indigeneity out

of its perceived inferiority, Cortez is quick to remind readers that Menendez Pelayo saw in Garcilaso a new period of Spanish cultural hegemony. Despite his allegiance to Hispanic cultural imperialism, Menendez Pelayo created a space for a transatlantic category of Hispanic literature that evoked a new colonial literature and reconceptualized the colonial archive.

The second part of *Biografía y polémica* shifts away from Garcilaso's American and European contexts to consider how Peruvian historians, such as Manuel González de la Rosa, José de la Riva Agüero, and José Toribio Polo, defended Garcilaso's historical and cultural authority in the years preceding and following the War of the Pacific (1887-1893). The context of the war is important in understanding how it shifted Peruvian sentiment regarding the national project where the loss against Chile impacted Peru's developing nationalism. As a result, the figure of Garcilaso, once again, emerged as a possible model for the cultural production of "el primer peruano" (216). Cortez situates this context by describing how Polo was able to formulate new questions regarding Garcilaso's life that disrupted many of the conclusions that North American and Spanish historians formed to exclude Garcilaso from being seen as a figure of any historical authority. More than disrupting old conceptions of Garcilaso's life, Polo posits a new cultural position for the mestizo author by arguing that Garcilaso can best be understood as a cultural, rather than literary or historical, hero. This turn to culture over literature and history recuperates the image of Garcilaso at a foundational moment within the construction of Peru's historical memory.

Polo's cultivation of Garcilaso as a national cultural hero is taken up in the later chapters by Riva-Agüero who reconstructs Garcilaso's image as a figure of verisimilar historical authority through deep analysis of his writings that dispelled claims of plagiarism and elevated the mestizo author into a position of unparalleled national, historical, and cultural authenticity. In conversation with the North American and Spanish historians covered so far in *Biografía y*

polémica, the concluding chapter situates mestizaje as a necessary mediating factor within the construction of Peruvian nationalism. Through the figure of Garcilaso as a mediating voice in the construction of the new nation and its history, Garcilaso stands as a seminal example for recuperating the Andean colonial past under discursive strategies that blur the traditional lines of literature and history.

Throughout *Biografía y polémica*, Enrique Cortez unsettles prior concepts of the colonial archive as a purely historical product and presents a convincing argument for how the archive remains an open and unsettled space for interpretations of the past. By revealing the potential for the archive to unsettle and reshape notions of canonization and categorization (311), the figure of El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega becomes a central figure within the historical inclusion of indigenous knowledges and traditions within the construction of the new national discourse. Through this approach, Cortez inserts new life into the legacy of Garcilaso by approaching his work as a “textual archive” [“texto-archivo”] (315) that produces, rather than reproduces, new national and cultural discourses. In such a way, Cortez allows readers to engage with Garcilaso from new discursive and critical positions to question not only the politics of his composition, but the politics of historical engagements with the famed Peruvian author. Beyond the figure of Garcilaso himself, and into a wider context of mestizaje, *Biografía y polémica* asks the reader to question what other forms of cultural hybridity in the Global South can be reorganized around unstable concepts of history, literature, and identity toward the construction of new cultural discourses. While the book does not offer much textual analysis of Garcilaso in order to situate him within the specifics of the Andean archive beyond the circulation of indigenous knowledge, *Biografía y polémica* is an important contribution to the growing interest in the colonial archive and is a mandatory reading alongside Gonzalo Lamana’s recent *How “Indians” Think* to offer contemporary readers a fresh and engaging view of

how the colonial archive incorporates indigenous repertoires, which, together, influence and shape national identities. Within these constructions of national identity around the figure of the mestizo, mestizaje is opened from an ethnic category to a heterogeneous cultural one that uses Garcilaso as a model for the construction of contemporary Latin American identity.