

Colonial Latin American literature

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Arias, Santa and Eyda M. Merediz, eds. *Approaches to Teaching the Writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas*. New York: Modero Language Association, 2008. 284 pp. ISBN 978-0-87352-945-7

Chang-Rodríguez, Raquel, ed. "Aquí ninfas del sur, venid ligeras": Voces poéticas virreinales. Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert; Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2008. 437 pp. ISBN 978-84-8489-343-1

Estrada, Oswaldo. *La imaginación novelesca: Bernal Diaz entre géneros y épocas*. Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert; Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2008. 437 pp. ISBN 978-84-8489-432-2

Lamana, Gouzalo. *Domination without Dominance: Inca-Spanish Encounters in Early Colonial Peru*. Durham: Duke UP, 2008. 287 pp. ISBN 978-0-8223-4311-0

The vitality of the field of colonial Latin American literature can be confirmed by the large number of interesting publications in the past year. The following review essay will discuss a small sampling of recent works: a volume in the MLA Approaches to Teaching World Literature series, an anthology of viceregal poetry, and a pair of critical studies by two promising junior scholars. First, it is exciting that after the appearance of *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (1997), a second volume in the MLA series has been devoted to an important figure in colonial Latin American literature: Bartolomé de Las Casas. Santa Arias and Eyda Merediz, the editors of *Approaches to Teaching the Writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas*, have produced a stellar collection of essays that will be of interest to students and scholars. Both the thematic range and complexity of Las Casas's writings are reflected by the highly

interdisciplinary nature of this collection and the large number of essays (there are no less than 28 contributors).

Like many of the volumes from the MLA series, *Approaches to Teaching the Writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas* provides professors with invaluable information for developing lectures, incorporating innovative pedagogical approaches, and creating syllabi for the classroom. Many of the contributions would be ideal secondary readings in undergraduate and graduate courses. The section entitled "Teaching Las Casas across the Disciplines" contains four excellent essays that examine his writings in the context of the fields of literature (Rolena Adorno), history (Lawrence A. Clayton), anthropology (Laura Lewis), and religious studies (Kristy Nabhan-Warren). There are also a number of essays (Ruth Hill, Cynthia L. Stone, Gustavo Verdesio, Angelica Duran, David F. Slade, Karen Stolley, and Sara L. Lehman) that would effectively complement syllabi featuring Las Casas's *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, which is the focus of most of volume. The contributions in the section entitled "Teaching Las Casas from a Comparative Perspective" (Elizabeth Sauer, Thomas Scanlan, Jonathan Hart, and Lúcia Helena Costigan) provide a number of useful ideas for framing this text within an early modern transatlantic perspective. The essays addressing the issue of the relationship between Las Casas's writings and the Atlantic slave trade (Rolena Adorno, Lúcia Helena Costigan, Eyda Merediz and Verónica Salles-Reese) provide an interesting counterpoint to classroom discussions of Las Casas as defender of the indigenous. Also pedagogically interesting is the attention to forms of visual culture as a means of examining the writings of the Dominican friar, either through early modern engravings and illustrations (Gustavo Verdesio, Angelica Duran, Jonathan Hart) or recent works of film (Eyda Merediz). Lastly, scholars will find inspiration in contributions that deal with less frequently discussed texts and themes, as in the essays that analyze the maternal discourse of *De unico vocationis modo* (Song No), demonstrate how to organize a thematic course on confession in relation to the *Reglas para confesores* (Regina Harrison), or examine Las Casas's legacy in liberation theology (Erik Camayd-Freixas).

The new anthology edited by Raquel Chang-Rodríguez, "*Aquí ninfas del sur, venid ligeras*": *Voces poéticas virreinales*, is an invaluable reference work on the literary history of early Spanish American poetry. The volume is a much needed update of *Poesía hispanoamericana colonial*. Historia y antología (1985), a book she co-edited

with Antonio R. de la Campa, which until now had been the standard work on colonial era poetry for graduate program reading lists. In this completely revamped anthology, the introductory section has been considerably augmented, the selection of poems has expanded substantially, the diversity/number of poets has increased, and new supplemental images along with a chronology have been added. Although Madre Castillo was inexplicably excised, an important feature is that more women's voices have been included: Leonor de Ovanda (often identified as the first woman poet of the colonies), María de Estrada Medinilla (a contemporary of Sor Juana), and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda have joined Clarinda, Amarilis, and Sor Juana. Since Avellaneda is so frequently anthologized (most recently in the *MLA Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Women's Poetry from Spain*), and not often classified as colonial/viceregal, her inclusion at first seemed curious. Nevertheless, this addition is valuable since the selections included are amongst the most aesthetically and thematically engaging poetas of the volume and Avellaneda's life and work best exemplify Romanticism. The recent surge in criticism on epic poetry is reflected by another interesting addition, excerpts of Martín del Barco Centenera's *La Argentina y conquista dei Río de la Plata*.

The anthology also includes many more selections by the viceregal period's most celebrated poet: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. The romance endecasílabo ("Lámina sirve al cielo") that she wrote to her principal patroness, and which many critics consider one of her most beautiful poems, joins more frequently anthologized sonnets and redondillas. Instead of privileging works that echo the classics of Golden Age literature, more poems that facilitate imperial/colonial readings appear: Sor Juana's elegy on the death of the Vicereine Leonor Carreto, her sonnet praising Francisco de Castro's poem in honor of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and her "final" romance to the "inimitable pens of Europe." The *Primero sueño* is included in its entirety, now divided into the schematic sections proposed by Georgina Sabat-Rivers and Elías Rivers to facilitate reading. The revisions to the bibliography on each of the poets, perhaps the most important critical contribution of this history/anthology, are most apparent in the section on Sor Juana and are a testament to the increased scholarly interest in viceregal poetry of the last few decades.

While Chang-Rodriguez's anthology focuses on colonial poetry, Oswaldo Estrada's *La imaginación novelesca: Bernal Diaz entre géneros y épocas* examines a canonical prose work: Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*.

The study provides "un análisis posmoderno de la Historia verdadera en relación con el género de la novela" (13). From the start Estrada makes it clear that his aim is not to prove that Bernal Díaz's work is a novel but rather to highlight the author's incorporation of some of the features of the novel ("rasgos novelescos"). Chapter 1, "Desencuentros con la historiografía indiana," contextualizes his study of the work in relation to criticism on the distinction between history and literature and the blending of genres that characterizes many colonial texts. Citing Margarita Zamora's classic article "Historicity and Literariness" and her call to frame colonial texts within the socio-historical context and literary culture from which they emerged, Estrada notes that the *Historia verdadera* does not fit neatly into any of the dominant historical/literary categories of its era. Methodologically interesting is his proposal to eschew an exclusive focus on early modern textual production in favor of highlighting the literary qualities of the work itself (21).

Estrada begins his analysis of the novelistic traits of the *Historia verdadera* in Chapter 2, "Características de un lenguaje novelesco," by examining the text's language. In addition to highlighting the dialogic character of the work, he examines Bernal Díaz's use of orality, metaphor, and suspense. Chapter 3, "Personalidades novelescas del Nuevo Mundo," showcases the many "characters" of the *Historia verdadera* and Chapter 4, "Novelizaciones del tiempo y el espacio," focuses on time/space in the work. While Estrada's close attention to the text is a strength of this study, examples are often enumerated in a list-like fashion (particularly in the final pages of chapters). Many of his excellent observations could be strengthened by more elaboration, above all by more discussion of his points in relation to existing criticism on the *Historia verdadera*. Throughout the study, Estrada cites a voluminous amount of criticism on the modern novel from a wide range of critics and novelists (Erich Auerback, Mikhail Bakhtin, Dorrit Cohn, Umberto Eco, E.M. Forster, Northrop Frye, Carlos Fuentes, Georg Lukács, Ayn Rand, Mario Vargas Llosa, and others). While adopting a multiplicity of critical opinions on the novel is clearly part of his postmodern approach, this "novel" methodology at times privileges contemporary criticism/literature to such an extent that it may estrange more traditional colonialists. The isolation and identification of "rasgos novelescos" at times becomes confusing not only because of the wide variety of critical opinions cited, but also because many of these traits are found to some degree in other early modern genres and/or they have not been clearly differentiated from non-novelistic literary

models that influenced the work in question. The author's somewhat casual references to such texts, as in his discussion of *doria Marina* as Biblical heroine (95) or Cortés's rise to fame as reminiscent of epic poetry (104), seem to debilitate the argument that the author adopts features that are exclusively novelistic. Nevertheless, Estrada's elegant prose effectively delineates the literary elements of Bernal Díaz's work and its important place within Spanish American literature. The concluding chapter, "Diálogos con la nueva ficción histórica," examines the legacy of the *Historia verdadera* in recent historical fiction from Mexico, a topic that will be of great interest to scholars of contemporary Latin American literature. As in Rolena Adorno's *The Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative*, the final chapter examines how a colonial text dialogues with contemporary novels: Carlos Fuentes's *El naranjo*, Carmen Boullosa's *Llanto*, Ignacio Solares's *Nen, la inútil*, and Laura Esquivel's *Malinche*.

While Estrada analyzes a foundational literary work of the colonial period, the masterfully written, brilliantly argued, and theoretically sophisticated *Domination without Dominance: Inca-Spanish Encounters in Early Colonial Peru* by Gonzalo Lamana tackles a foundational event: the Conquest of Peru. Heavily influenced by New Historicism, postcolonial theory, and subaltern studies, Lamana states at the outset that the goal of his project is to provide an alternative history: "This book's overall contention is that a pervasive colonial imprint still permeates accounts of what happened almost 500 years ago, and its goal is to provide an alternative historical narrative that at once examines this imprint and shifts away from it. The aim is to present, then, not an anticolonial narrative since what is 'anti' is constrained by (and inadvertently echoes) the conceptual frames of what it opposes, but a decolonial one" (1). The well-known narrative Lamana deconstructs, one that is provided by nineteenth-century historians and even recent works like Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, is that the Conquest of the Incas was a process in which rational Western actors triumphed through cultural superiority (3). The introduction clearly outlines the author's methodology and contains a number of interesting theoretical proposals, chief among them is the idea that his alternative history of the conquest seeks "[...] to reintroduce cultural difference and, to avoid the risk of orientalization, to simultaneously de-occidentalize the conquerors--that is, to question the distinctive image they intended to convey of themselves and their acts. This strategy is twofold because it seeks to respond to the two main Spanish, imperial mechanisms of subalternization, or work both on the ground and in the narratives: exotization and

erasure" (5). Lamana explains that a central feature of his decolonial methodology, one that has been absent in many other academic responses, is to examine exotization and erasure of the Other since an exclusive focus on only one of these mechanisms reinforces either the Western claim of universality or exorization (6). In differentiating his approach to interpreting the textual corpus of accounts on the Conquest of Peru, Lamana states that the numerous Spanish accounts (Hernando Pizarro, Francisco Xérez, Pedro Pizarro, etc) offer a false coherence and should be supplemented with readings of "native-like" accounts (Juan de Betanzos, Tiro Cussi Yupangui, Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, Guaman Poma). In addition to highlighting the need to closely analyze often-dismissed events and to illuminate local understandings, methodologically interesting is his strategy of supplementing these narratives with legal documents called probanzas to capture Spanish and indigenous "attempts to make sense of things" (10-11).

The first two chapters treat two well-known historical episodes: Atahualpa's encounter with the Spaniards in Cajamarca and his subsequent capture. In the first chapter, Lamana contests Western representations of "rigidly ritualized responses" of native peoples (41), as in Todorov's famous depiction of the Conquest of the Aztecs, by demonstrating that Atahualpa's attempts to understand and interact with the newly arrived Spaniards were a "constant oscillation between protocol and improvisation" (51). He also questions the interpretation that Atahualpa's capture was part of Spanish plan and in Chapter 2 attempts to demonstrate that Atahualpa's "ransom" was not a premeditated Spanish strategy. By examining the Inca's actions and highlighting native understandings of the demands for gold and silver in probanzas, Lamana demonstrates that Atahualpa's messengers had explained to indigenous curacas that the "big sheep" (horses) are gold and silver. He concludes that "[...] Atahualpa chose the format within which to ask ethnic lords for gold and silver; the ransom was not a form that made local sense, but that the eerie 'big sheep' were hungry seemed to work" (72). Lamana thus emphasizes the role of indigenous actors (including Atahualpa himself) and their representations of the invading Spaniards. The "magical" descriptions of the horses from native accounts then resurface in the Spaniards' own explanations of events, countering a dominant paradigm that represents "[...] action as taking place between Western rational actors engaged on a clear political terrain. There is no alterity, magicity, or radical uncertainty" (77).

One of the main strengths of this study is that in addition to methodically examining a key series of events in the history of the Conquest of Peru, Lamana complements his interpretations of on-the-ground events with observations on larger questions about the process of state-formation, the mechanisms of colonialism, and the nature of power. Chapter 3 focuses on conflicts that occurred before the war with Manco Inca. In highlighting the Spaniards' use of civilizing discourse and establishing that their invitation of the Crown's authority was a response to their own lack of power, Lamana concludes that state-building from a colonial perspective was not a "forceful imposition" but rather "fragile and effective only when locally invited, dependant largely on making itself available. That is, the efficacy of power lay in its weakness" (99). Chapter 4 deals with Manco Inca's war and attempts to provide an interpretation that is not merely based on the analysis of military tactics. Thus, instead of discussions of the efficacy of sharp vs. blunt weapons, Lamana attempts to attach meaning to the series of disparate events that unfolded. This very detailed and highly original analysis, which is contextualized within a meditation on dominance and hegemony (126), demonstrates that attempts to establish the order of things and mimesis (miming the actions of the opposing party) were the primary motors of the conflict. Despite alluding to the Spaniards' "hegemonic impulses" (147), Lamana then suggests that Manco Inca's battles to define the quotidian contrast sharply with Spanish modes of domination (violence and coercion). Perhaps what Lamana is partly suggesting here is that the large number of native casualties, at least in the case of Manco Inca's war, was partly due to these divergent strategies. More explicitly the point, however, is that violence was central in the establishment of what the author labels "the colonial normal." He illustrates this idea by moving from the topic of Manco Inca's war to everyday concerns regarding logistics. Transportation, a topic that Lamana feels has been neglected by previous scholars (148), evolved from being a highly organized system of reciprocal labor into one in which violence and the coercion of Indians were common. The colonial normal develops in this way, "through murky appropriations and redefinitions guided by practical reason, everyday moments in which 'what the natives do' matches and slips into 'what the colonizer needs.'" (156).

The final chapters of Lamana's book deal with the period after Manco Inca's war and seek to question traditional periodization that views the conclusion of the war as signaling the end of Inca power and the beginning of uncontested dominance by the Spanish. Chapter 5 examines the often ignored ascendancy to power of Paullu Inca and

Chapter 6 examines the years 1543-1548 in order to illustrate that, while the colonial normal was being established, Spanish dominance was still contested by natives. The very brief Chapter 7 simply serves to advance the idea that Pedro de la Gasca's governorship (1548-1549) marks the end of this historical period for Lamana. In attempting to point out some deficiencies in this study, the selective bias in regards to the interpretation of indigenous actors immediately comes to mind. For instance, in Chapter 4 Manco Inca's decision to only carry out attacks during a full moon is not viewed as the inability to innovate but rather as a logical political decision (128-29). This contrasts sharply with the emphasis on Atahualpa's ability to deviate from Inca protocol in Chapter 1, although Manco's actions are explained by emphasizing that he sought to assert Inca hegemony by renewing the everyday order of things rather than by violent imposition (the Spanish strategy). However, the idea that Manco's military actions were not simply about "annihilating his adversaries" (126) is also advanced by setting up a neat opposition with the "senseless cruelty" of the Spanish, one that is not fully justified in terms of the events of the war itself although it is perhaps more apparent in the section on transportation/logistics. Traditional historians may object to certain conclusions on the grounds that they are drawn by ignoring the limitations of incomplete textual sources, by assigning larger significance to a selection of minor details, or by claiming the ability to accurately convey native interpretations of historical events. Nevertheless, Lamana's analysis is more often convincing and, as in Inga Clendinnen's seminal essay "Fierce and Unnatural Cruelty," serves to fill a void in scholarship that seeks to understand conquest and colonization from the perspective of indigenous peoples. More importantly, this ambitious study not only successfully challenges traditional historiography on the Conquest of Peru, it contributes a number of original observations to scholarship on power, colonialism, and stateformation. *Dominion without Dominance* contains a wealth of ideas about the history of the conquest and, more generally, about the dynamics of power in colonial settings.

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