

RECONCILING THE DIVIDED SELF: INCA GARCILASO DE LA VEGA'S *ROYAL COMMENTARIES* AND HIS PLATONIC VIEW OF THE CONQUEST OF PERU

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RESUMEN

Mi ensayo intenta demostrar que la producción literaria y el discurso histórico del siglo XVII se encuentran restringidos por la política imperial de expansión y conquista de España. La primera generación de escritores latinoamericanos representa un ejemplo evidente del acomodo del discurso mestizo, el cual tiene que circunscribirse de manera que pueda ser publicado y leído principalmente por un público europeo. Uno de los primeros escritores americanos que logra ser publicado y leído es el Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, hijo de una mujer indígena del Perú y de un conquistador español. Garcilaso escribe a una edad avanzada usando sus recuerdos de los hechos de la conquista del Perú. Su memoria nos narra la historia de la civilización de los Incas vista a través de las teorías neoplatónicas que exponen las ideas filosóficas de síntesis y armonía universal. Garcilaso evita confrontar y cuestionar las ideas imperialistas de España y, por consiguiente, el autor oscurece y silencia la gran catástrofe humana que impuso el dominio español a la población aborigen del Virreinato de Nueva Castilla en Perú. Aunque las ideas neoplatónicas y el providencialismo católico le permitieron al Inca Garcilaso insertarse en el establecimiento literario europeo, el discurso garcilasiano fracasó en presentar las fricciones y fisuras del llamado encuentro de las dos culturas.

ABSTRACT

This paper tries to demonstrate how the production of literature and historical discourse were restrained by policies of imperial expansion. The first generation of Latin American writers are examples of having to shape a discourse that would allow them to publish and be heard mainly by an European audience. One of the first writers to publish a literary work is El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, son of an indigenous woman and a Spanish conqueror. Writing in an old age, Garcilaso tells the story of Inca Civilization under the theories of neo-platonism, a philosophical approach to universal synthesis and harmony. Garcilaso avoids confrontation to the European establishments by obscuring the hard facts of colonial rule in the Viceroyalty of New Castile, modern Peru. Neo-platonism and providentialism failed to reconcile the so-called encounter of two cultures

Gómez Suárez de Figueroa, later known as Inca Garcilaso de la Vega was born eight years after the conquest of Peru. Son of an Inca noble woman, Chimpu Occlo and of a Spanish conqueror, Captain Garcilaso de la Vega, he was one of the first *mestizo* (mixed breed) writers that was able to publish a version of the conquest of Peru in the seventeenth century. The first part of *Los Comentarios Reales*, considered by literary criticism as the bible of Inca culture, was published in 1609 and the second part, *Historia General del Perú* was published in 1615, a few years after the writer's death. Because his work was produced under the pressure of European culture and censorship, Garcilaso's account of Peruvian history celebrates the European notions of platonic progression of history while obscuring the hard realities of colonial practices in Peru.

Being at the center of historical and racial junctures, he tries to reconcile his own divided self by rendering his *Comentarios* under neo-platonic concepts of conquest.

One of these junctures that should be considered is the insertion of non-European historical discourse in the literary world. In less than a century after the discovery of America, the first *mestizo* writers appear mainly in the capitals of the two viceroyalties, Lima and Mexico City. The Indians' oral culture did not prepare them for written expression in European tongues. Marginalized politically and socially, they were also marginalized in the sphere of communication. The impact and consequences of writing in the aboriginal civilizations is illustrated by some anecdotes of the first generation of American writers. Inca Garcilaso narrates a "humorous" tale titled "Garden, plants and herbs; their size" in his first part of *Comentarios Reales* that depicts the perplexity that writing caused in the native population: Two Indian servants have been charged of taking ten melons to their master. In their way, one of them is curious about the melons, a fruit he has never tasted. When he tries to convince his fellow servant to try it, the other replied:

"No, because if we eat any, this letter will say so, as the steward said." "Well," answered the first, "let's put the letter behind that wall, then it won't see us eat and won't be able to tell our master anything." His companion found this suggestion convincing and they at once put it into effect [...]. They presented the remaining eight to their master, and when he read the letter he said to them: "What happened to the two melons that are missing?" They both replied: "Sir, we were only given eight." Antonio Solar answered: "Why do you lie? This letter says you were given ten, and you have eaten two." The Indians were completely lost when they heard their master accuse them of what they had done in such secrecy. Confused and convicted, they had to admit the truth. They concluded that the Spaniards were rightly called gods, using the word Viracocha, since they could penetrate such complete secrets. (1.9.29: 604)

During the sixteenth and seventeenth century there was a precise distinction between spoken and written language. The use of writing separated civilized and barbaric societies since writing clearly indicated the superiority of its bearers. As Raquel Chang-Rodríguez (1988: 25) indicates in *La Apropiación del Signo*:

[T]he use of signs separated barbaric and civilized societies. Santo Tomás de Aquino (1225-1274), for instance, had indicated that those without writing were barbarians in second degree; they could not preserve, transmit or improve knowledge for civilized life. Moreover, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1490?-1573) used this argument to emphasize the inferiority of the ancient Americans, because without writing it was impossible to establish laws for the communities, and the only thing left was the customs that were practiced as moral education, but that Spaniards could not scrutinize because they were not written.

It is evident that since the initial phase of the discovery and colonization writing was the cultural frontier between the Old and New World. Writing is frequently depicted as an instrument of domination. The first writings by mestizos appeared in cities where there was an intense commercial activity between Spain and other colonies. The literature produced in these cities, as shown by Hernán Vidal in *Socio-Historia de la Literatura Colonial Hispanoamericana*, is intrinsically conditioned by the functions of the cities: "to create a coercive tool to subjugate the multiracial labor force" (90). For the most part, discourses from Europe are imported which once again create false representations of concrete social relations. These discourses exemplify deep contradictions since they originate in restrictive policies of imperial domination which do not allow for a faithful testimony of the racial, cultural, economical, and political complexities of the colony.

Writers of colonial Spanish America either assimilated the devalued image given by the dominant culture, like in Garcilaso's case, or created resistant and syncretic discourses out of the contact of cultures, the latter with the perils of "miscomprehension, incomprehension, dead letters, unread masterpieces, and absolute heterogeneity of meaning" (Pratt 1991: 37) as it happened with the writing of another Peruvian writer, Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, whose chronicle of the conquest of Peru was conveniently lost for over two centuries.

Prior to the publication of his *Comentarios Reales*, Garcilaso had started his apprenticeship in the world of literature by acting as a translator and as a scribe for the works *Diálogo de Amor* (1590) and *La Florida del Inca* (1605). In the first work, Garcilaso approaches the meditation of Platonic theories about universal love and harmony current then in the Spanish Renaissance, and in the second one, serving as a scribe for Gonzalo Silvestre who took part in Hernando de Soto's expedition in the territory of Florida where he deals with material about the heroic deeds of the conquest and colonization of America. Garcilaso's initial writing constitutes a preparation for his own creation in his two celebrated volumes about Peru; for, on the one hand, he shapes the tone of his biblical and universal encounter of two cultures; and, on the other hand, he rehearses telling the American history within the frame of heroic providentialism. By doing so, he ascribes to the Crown ideology that justifies its presence in the New World and unavoidably deforms the indigenous Andean history since providentialism celebrates in the name of God the European appropriation of America and the destruction of the Amerindian culture.

The extent to which neo-platonism dominated Garcilaso's thought is a theme deeply related to his perception of the Spanish conquest of Peru. The neo-platonic view of the universe was strongly influential in his writing. The influence of neo-platonism in Garcilaso is seen in first, the use of myth, particularly the myth of Jupiter, as loving conqueror recounted in his *Diálogo de Amor*; second, in the idea of progression from barbaric, pagan ignorance to knowledge of the true God; third, in the spirit of order and harmony that pervades his work, and; fourth, in the idea of the divine will at work in the world.

Being on the margins, Garcilaso realizes that for a *mestizo* to write history is a daring enterprise. He does not belong to any established order: he is a foreigner and a natural son. Consequently, he shelters himself with the labels of translator, scribe, and commentator. Garcilaso masks and neutralizes his narrative voice in order to affirm the nobility of the Amerindian (including his own) and at the same time he desires to avoid confrontation with the European establishment. He resorts to the ideas of neoplatonism which provided him with the latitude of inclusion: "[T]he philosophical instinct in the Italian Renaissance was to synthesize thought systems, to find a common, universal philosophy that encompasses a broad range of human thought" (Hooker 1996:1). His gesture is a pendulum-like-movement that saves the Indian at the expense of destroying him.

In writing *Historia General del Perú*, Garcilaso uses as sources many of the same ones he used for the first part of his *Comentarios*. He also had the advantage of information collected from such people as Gonzalo Silvestre, who went to Peru after the Florida expedition. Another source, though no doubt prejudiced, was Garcilaso's father and his friends who were mainly the rich *encomenderos* or land owners. Often Garcilaso remarks that he had certain facts from his father, or that a story he has just told was exactly as he heard it from his father's friends. All the information from such sources was valuable, but none of it gives the

Historia its particular value and interest; that comes from Garcilaso's own personal participation in some of the events he records, and from his having lived through the troubled, and for him exciting, period in which the authority of the Spanish government was established over the obstreperous conquerors of the Incas. Garcilaso's account encompasses fifty years of events that go from 1532 with the arrival of Pizarro, Almagro, and Luque in Tumbes until 1572 with Toledo's execution of Tupac Amaru. Writing in his late seventy's, Garcilaso is remembering past experiences that at least date back forty five years.

Garcilaso recalls with the most extreme admiration the conquerors of Peru. He compares them to the second Roman triumvirate, and not to the advantage of the Romans. According to this Peruvian author, it was neither greed nor the desire to exercise power that took the conquerors to the New World, but the wish to improve the native's life.

The triumvirate formed by these three Spaniards at Panama seems to me comparable with that established by the three Roman emperors at Laino near Bologna. Nevertheless the aims of the two groups were so different that it would be ridiculous to press the comparison. Whereas the three Romans were emperors whose purpose was to divide among themselves the whole world conquered by the Romans so as to enjoy it in peace, our three Spaniards were private persons who set themselves the task of winning an empire in the New World without knowing how it was to be done or what the cost would be. And when we consider the results of the two triumvirates, we see that the Romans were three tyrants who oppressed the world, whereas the Spaniards were three generous leaders whose deeds were such that any of them would have made a worthy emperor. The Roman league was intended to destroy a world, which it did; the Spanish, to enrich one, and this it did, and still does every day. (2.1.2: 635)

His rhetorical fashioning of a continuous narrative is supported by his own conception of progress. Garcilaso's view of the conquest is not a fragmented one, but a flow in civilization. The Indians progressed from a state of total barbarism to a higher state of civilization under the Incas. This state with all its commendable qualities was seriously lacking in one aspect according to Garcilaso. This aspect is religion. To worship the sun was better than to worship wild beast of various kinds, but the worship of the sun was only a step toward the true religion brought by the Spaniards. Christianity was their greatest contribution to the Indians who, in accepting faith, attained a higher degree of perfection that they had ever had before, even though it was accompanied by the loss of their culture and destruction of their lives. As Nathan Watchel points out in *Sociedad e Ideología* "Garcilaso's acculturation always moves into the total absorption of Western thought; Garcilaso's assimilation consists in rendering one into the other" (167).

As a result, he adapts his history of the conquest of Peru to a division of Western history often found in the Renaissance. The first division had man living under the law of nature; the second, under the law of Moses; the third, under the law of Christ. He demonstrates that the highest state for the Indians was not to be found in the past, but in the present under the Spanish rule. For Garcilaso, this progress represents the result of one of the guiding principles that give order to the universe and, hence, provides to him and to Spain the necessary justification to colonize America. The whole process of human history for Garcilaso is activated by divine providence; it is the manifestation of God's judgments and the working out of His will. Mark Sidwell expresses it in the following way,

[T]he Christian does not start by studying history in order to discern patterns of providence and lesson of history. The believer starts with the Word of God. Not only is Scripture his starting point in determining what

providence is, but also it provides his yardstick in evaluating persons and movements. In the ultimate sense, history does not actually teach lessons; it can only illustrate the lessons that God teaches in His Word. (2)

Garcilaso, who insistently identifies himself as an Indian, can praise those who were viciously instrumental in the collapse of the Indian empire and exploited the native people they conquered. Because for him the Spanish conquest is no source of dissatisfaction, Garcilaso affirms that conquest is not only justifiable, but desirable if it brings with it improvements for the conquered. The Incas based the expansion of their empire upon the command of Manco Capac who would educate the barbarians and show them the true way. The Incas were successful because they were moving in the right direction by introducing a monotheistic believe and, as a consequence, preparing the natives to accept Christianity. The Spaniards based their conquest on the same principle, the belief that it was the privilege and the duty of Christians to bring the Gospel to the heathen. In his attitude toward Incan and Spanish military conquest, Garcilaso shows no inconsistency or ambiguity: Military force is an acceptable means to bring civilization.

If the Incas received credit in Garcilaso's opinion for furthering the cause of true religion, the Spaniards received even more. Providentialism, tool of the imperial ideology of expansion, is stated more directly in the *Historia*. Signs of divine mercy and of God's guidance of human affairs are evident throughout the book. For example, one of the first signs of the working of God's will occurred during Pizarro's preliminary explorations. The Spaniards landed at Tumbes and were curious about the place. Pedro de Candía, armed with Christian faith and conviction, clothed from head to toe in armor and carrying a crucifix, set out to explore. The natives were dumbfounded at the sight as Candía marched into their town and sent against him a lion and a tiger:

[T]hese wild beasts, seeing the Christian and his crucifix, went toward him and, loosing their native ferocity, approached like two dogs he had reared himself, and greeted him and lay down at his feet. Pedro de Candía, seeing this miracle of God and deriving courage from it, stopped to pat the beasts' heads and backs, and raised the cross over them, indicating to the heathens that its virtue had tamed and calmed the ferocity of the animals. This finally convinced the Indians that he was a child of the Sun sent from heaven. In this belief they came toward him and by common consent all adored him as the child of their god Sun. (2.1.12: 656)

With such evidence that the conquest of the Incan empire was an undertaking carried out under divine sponsorship, it is but a step to assume that whatever material wealth the Spaniards found was but a just reward for their sacrifices in bringing Christianity to the heathen, and that it was the duty of those saved to serve their conquerors. There was always to be sure, the obligation of the Christians to do everything possible to ensure that proper religious instruction was given to the new converts.

Garcilaso is so convinced in the idea of Christian imperialism that when he deals with the figure of Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, he heaps upon Las Casas only negative regards. Las Casas, the great apostle of the Indians, inspired the laws, known as Ordinances, which sought to abolish *encomienda* and to eliminate force labor on the Indians. In all his christianizing arguments, Garcilaso never comments on the state of the Indian masses. Ironically, Garcilaso considered Las Casas a tool of the devil because of the adoption of the New Laws. For instance, when Garcilaso narrates the arrival of the new Viceroy, Blasco Núñez Vela to Peru, he is quick to point out that Núñez Vela had none of the former governor

Vaca de Castro's elasticity since Núñez Vela came determined to apply the Ordinances which could only precipitate a new period of civil strife. Therefore, in Garcilaso's view the Ordinances are intrusive and evil. Talking about former bureaucrats such as Vaca de Castro who fulfilled the conqueror's expectations, Garcilaso explains:

With all this prosperity and the administration of a governor so Christian, so noble, so wise, so zealous in the service of our Lord God and his king, the empire flourished and improved from day to day. And what is most important, the teaching of our holy Catholic Faith was spread throughout the whole land with great care by the Spaniards, and the Indians accepted it with no less gladness and satisfaction, for they saw that much of what they were taught what their Inca kings taught them and bidden them to observe under their natural law. In the majesty of the preaching of the holy Gospel and the prosperity of peace, quiet, and the enjoyment of spiritual and temporal goods that Indians and Spaniards alike then possessed, the Devil, that enemy of the human race, ordained that all these good things should be spoiled and reversed. (2.3.19: 933)

Garcilaso found the New Laws totally unacceptable as probably his father and his father's friends did too, since all the privilege of their power and wealth was now under the control and regulation of the Crown. However, Garcilaso does not state so in terms of power and privileges. Instead what he says is that the original method of assigning Indians and lands to Spaniards better served the purpose of religious instruction. He gives the idea that all Spanish masters were all well intentioned and took full duty toward their charges in their paternalistic system of protecting and converting the native population.

With Núñez Vela and later with the death of Gonzalo Pizarro by the royal army, the beginning of a new order in the viceroyalty of New Castile started. Not the one most pleasing for Garcilaso, since he believed in aristocratic order, and aristocrats deserved respect and consideration befitting their privileged position. The last viceroy to appear in the *Historia* was Francisco de Toledo, who had the reputation of being a harsh and unjust enemy of the Indian. Toledo was in fact probably a devoted, energetic officer of the Crown, deserving of the title sometimes given to him as Solon of Peru. Toledo's theory was that so long as the old Incan customs remained, and so long as there were remnants of the royal family in locations where they could stir rebellion, the Spanish position was not secure. Toledo effectively put an end to what was left of the Inca social structure and exiled the mestizos who were related to the Inca lineage. The end of the *Comentarios* documents the complete collapse of the Inca Empire. The epic tone of the first chapters contrasts sharply with the sorrowful natives witnessing the decapitation of their last emperor, Tupac Amaru.

At the end of his story, Garcilaso's glorious hymn turns into a nostalgic view of native culture. It is only at the end of Garcilaso's narration that the Andean people's grief is shown. Garcilaso's silent and resigned masses of Indian did not accept with indifference the authority projected over them, or the general subservience on which their presence is predicated in his work. The discovery of the text *Nueva Crónica y Buen Gobierno* written by the Andean chronicler Guamán Poma de Ayala elicits a new reading of Garcilaso's *Comentarios Reales*. For that reason, Garcilaso's great canonical text should be read with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented in his history. Garcilaso's picture of Peru has a quality that belongs not only to his narration to an European audience, but also to its administrators, apologists, and furthermore, to the Andean people whose aspirations, efforts, and survival are misrepresented under the sign of neo-platonism.

The literary responses formulated by the first generation of American writers need to be studied within the historical frame of the Spanish colonization. This great masterpiece of colonial literature should be set in global and earthly context. Yet it is generally true that literary historians who study the great seventeenth-century writer Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, for example, do not connect his prose achievement to Spain's machiavellian plan for Peru where the Spanish conqueror virtually exterminated the native inhabitants. Take for example the introduction to Inca Garcilaso de la Vega in Anderson Imbert's anthology:

El más genial de los mestizos escritores es el Inca Garcilaso de la Vega. Descendía de la nobleza incaica y castellana; pero, además, por parte de padre, de una familia ilustre también en la historia de las letras. La fusión en su conciencia de esos diversos mundos raciales y culturales fue el punto de partida de su vida de escritor. (75)

Garcilaso's book will be always part of the canonical reading list in colonial studies, but it seems more interesting to see Garcilaso's history in interaction with lost histories written at the same time and about the same material by other native writers since the discovery of such documents makes it possible. On his remarks about the British colonization of Africa, Edward Said affirmed in *Culture and Imperialism* a statement that could be also applied when thinking of Garcilaso's literary production:

Neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination. [. . .] Out of the imperial experience, notions about culture were clarified, reinforced, criticized or rejected. (9)

Works of literature are not autonomous, literature itself makes constant references to itself as somehow participating in the overseas expansion, and therefore creates structures of feelings that support, elaborate, and consolidate the practice of colonialism. Just to think how fast Garcilaso published and circulated in Europe his *Comentarios Reales* and, moreover, how it was applauded as the symbol of the encounter between two cultures is suspicious: a sanitized version of the conquest of Peru under the sign of providentialism written by a *mestizo* who could actually write literary Spanish prose during Spain's Golden Age. Culture provided the protective enclosure to attain structures of feeling with which the Spanish empire could sustain three centuries of dominance over far away lands. Being a *mestizo* and a natural son in the heavily stratified seventeenth century Spain made him a frightening outsider seeking always his place in society, one way to secure his connection with the Crown was writing. Garcilaso's *Comentarios* has a standing interest in connection with the Empire. It celebrates a certain idea of history, and at the same time obscures the fundamental geographical and political reality empowering that idea.

Understanding how imperialistic goals work together with the circulation of culture does not reduce or diminish the value of the *Comentarios Reales* as a work of art: on the contrary, because of its worldly marks and complex affiliations with its setting, Garcilaso's work is more valuable as a work of art. However, to ignore a work of art from its entanglement and dependencies on other knowledges is to promote demagoguery rather than to enable understanding. Because of the conquest, colonial discourse was massively knotted to overlapping and interconnected histories, not just of Spaniards' or Native Americans', but of

both acting in each other. Four centuries later, the coincidence between the imperial vision of the world and literary history seems familiar and at the same time problematic since culture is exonerated of its relation with power and presented in a timeless and universal vacuum.

Garcilaso saw only the politics of the empire. Such view, which in the closing years of the sixteenth century seemed to be at the same time an aesthetic, political, and even epistemological unavoidable, limited his historical vision. Even when Garcilaso includes Peru in history, even when he creates a country for himself, what he leaves out compresses and consolidates the imperial power. No dissent or departure is shown from Garcilaso's virtual unanimity that Andean people should be ruled and that one race deserves and has consistently earned the right to be considered the race whose main mission is to expand beyond its main domain. Dismissed is the detailed, violent history of colonial intervention in the lives of individuals and collectivities.

The mythical view of the Amerindian was a colonizing image that served as an instrument to the European historical discourse. The dominant ideology always wanted to believe and make believe that the Amerindian was an inferior being. Spain needed to justify its civilizing actions in the New World and the written chronicles of the moment supported the imperial idea with the necessary testimony of such endeavor. His *Comentarios Reales* were welcome because Garcilaso himself and his writings were the evidence of the Crown's effort to bring civilization, language and religion to the Andean people. Biologically, he was a product of the encounter; ideologically, he represented his father's group: the conquerors. Garcilaso's work has always been praised for its unity and coherence. Such qualities come precisely from the ideas and language of colonial theories of domination that transform Spain's appropriation of American land and people into a divine act.

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