

EDITED BY  
ALLISON KAVEY  
and ELIZABETH KETNER

# IMAGINING EARLY MODERN HISTORIES



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MODERN HISTORIES

*For A.W., the most elegant mind with whom  
to share history's fictions. A.K.*

*To Jay, Elliot, and Ingrid. E.K.*

# Imagining Early Modern Histories

Edited by

ALLISON KAVEY

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and

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**Sara McDougall** is Associate Professor of History at CUNY John Jay College and the Medieval Studies Certificate Program and French at the CUNY

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**Hyunhee Park** is Associate Professor of History at CUNY John Jay College. Her book *Mapping the Chinese and Islamic Worlds: Cross-Cultural Exchange in Pre-Modern Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) explores medieval contact and exchange between the Islamic World and China by utilizing geographic and cartographic information. She has broadened the focus of her prior research in terms of space, time, and methodology in her new research project, which encompasses world mapping and other types of information transfers spanning medieval Afro-Eurasia and the early modern Atlantic World, in order to explore their possible implications for global history. She is currently working on a book entitled *World Mapping and Cross-Cultural Contacts in Afro-Eurasia and the Atlantic World* and co-writing a book entitled *The Story of Soju: Distillation in Mongol Korea and its Eurasian Roots and Global Context*.

**Patrick B. Tuite** is the Chair of the Department of Drama at The Catholic University of America, where he runs the MA program in theater history and criticism and teaches graduate courses in early modern drama. In 2010, Susquehanna University Press published his book, *Theatre of Crisis: The Performance of Power in the Kingdom of Ireland, 1662–1692*. He has published articles in *Youth Theatre Journal*, *Theatre InSight*, and *The Drama Review*. His essays also appear in anthologies entitled *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance* (Greenwood Press, 2003), *Second Star to the Right: Peter Pan in the Popular Imagination* (Rutgers University Press, 2008), and *World Building and the Early Modern Imagination* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). He recently completed a fellowship at the Folger Shakespeare Library and has started to work on his second book, *Dramaturgy in the Age of Monarchy: New Play Development in Ireland, 1662–1665*.



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# Introduction

## Imagining Early Modern Histories

Allison Kavey

Writing histories—stories about how the world came to look and be a certain way—was among the most compelling preoccupations of the early modern period. The impulse to narrate was likely prompted, among other forces, by the expansion of local boundaries, violent changes in political structure and leadership, encounters with different geographies and cultures made possible by trade and travel, and the power dynamics between the church and state. The shifting sands of geography, political structure, and natural knowledge invited explanation, and authors from linguists to mapmakers volunteered. The resulting texts, translations, museums, objects, and performances provide an exceptional opportunity to consider the relationship between history and fiction in the early modern period. They invite us to investigate the role history played in the early modern imagination and to query the ways in which those imaginings shaped early modern culture. The essays in this collection interrogate the ways in which these imagined histories make use of the complicated relationship between known truths and new knowledge, facts and fictions, to react to and shape the context in which they were written. They do so from a variety of modern disciplinary approaches that would have had no meaning in the early modern world they strive to comprehend. One of the greatest challenges of early modern scholarship is resisting the urge to take our tools and shape the world we are studying to suit them. Instead, we must stretch our modern expectations to accommodate a foreign landscape that, while bearing some startling resemblances to our own, requires a more flexible and elegant mind. While we trained and practice as modern academics in specific disciplines, and we inherently depend upon the tools we developed during our careers, we are at our best in this volume when we shed those identities in favor of attempting to understand our sources as the products of early modern imaginations, steeped in fictions and shaped by histories. The project every author in this collection shares is very simple: in studying the early modern imagination, we must abandon our own imaginations and try to develop early modern ones.

This requires taking a significant step back and querying our dependence on a few key terms, all of which appear with dizzying frequency throughout this volume. First, what exactly is an early modern imagination? The OED provides a starting point from which to determine what exactly we mean, anyway. It defines imagination as “the faculty or action of forming new ideas, or images, or concepts of external objects not present to the senses.”<sup>1</sup> This statement clearly demonstrates the double task that every author in this volume undertakes: first,

we must imagine the early modern world and then we strive to understand how its inhabitants thought about themselves, their geographies, their neighbors, and the many new things they heard or read about but never personally encountered. Imagination is certainly individual, but as has been ably established by numerous scholars from many disciplines, it must also be understood as a cultural and/or national product. It can be informed by spontaneous individual reactions to unrelated phenomena, or it can be shaped by a particular cue. The essays in this volume that concentrate on this aspect of the early modern imagination divide by disciplinary lines, with the majority of literature scholars concentrating on imagined texts or fictions that prompt a particular response while the historians largely focus on the products resulting from accumulated independent imaginings. That said, however, Kavey crosses this divide in her essay, suggesting that the fictional history Ficino gave the *Corpus Hermeticum* in the mid-fifteenth century authorized and encouraged an ocean of new, Neoplatonic magical thoughts, and Park plays both sides of this field, examining both the maps that produced ideas about Asian geography and the reactions geographers had to those maps in later productions. In both of these cases, the disciplinary shift quite likely comes from playing with the term “fiction,” which is the next one that proves indispensable to the project undertaken in this volume. The OED is less useful here, providing the genre-specific definition, “literature, in the form of prose, especially short stories or novels, that describes imaginary events and people.”<sup>2</sup> Throughout this collection of essays, the authors expand this definition to include unintentionally untrue or inaccurate stories told about people, books, nations, and geographies, and manipulative texts that play with truths to produce specific reactions. Fiction as examined throughout this collection is not literature but narrative, artistic, or dramatic representation based either on a deliberate untruth, a sly misdirection, or an accident. We concentrate on the reactions, narratives, and artistic productions reiterating these fictions in order to understand how new fictions came from older ones, and sometimes how these new fictions were used to as the basis for emerging cultural truths. This shared project is perhaps best understood by examining two seemingly disparate essays: Brayton’s on the Johnson poem “To Penshurst” and Kobayashi’s examination of early modern ideas about Asia and Asians. The first takes a relatively traditional fictional text, a poem, and argues that it contains the seeds as well of an aggressively reformist political argument, while the latter examines a series of sources to better comprehend the stories early modern people told themselves about the exotic others populating the other half of the world. Both authors start with fictions, literary and otherwise, to uncover emerging ideas that served as the basis for new truths that informed the early modern cultural imagination. For the historians in this volume, this last term might seem to have been taken for granted, and certainly the literary scholars included here have paid great respect to the historical context in which their sources were composed. But “history” itself will not be taken for granted, even if it is merely, as the OED would have us believe, “the study of past events, especially in human affairs.”<sup>3</sup> We do not limit ourselves to events, instead relying on sources from magical books,

masques, and novellas to maps, travel narratives (uncommitted themselves in their relationship to both fiction and history), and trial transcripts. We study the material left behind after half a century, and we use them to try to better comprehend the stories early modern people told themselves about their own histories—and presents. Take, for example, McDougall's examination of the explanations given by accused medieval French murderesses at their trials and Ketner's analysis of gender and ideas about the relationship between king, subject, and "state" in the novellas of Marguerite de Navarre. Both authors develop a rich sense of the historical context in which their sources were produced, but they also indicate the histories that were produced as a result of their sources. Histories are the product of these sources as well as their wellspring, and across the volume, we trace their presence and their effects.

We are, of course, not alone in our reliance on these terms or our interest in these questions, but we do offer new material and investigate sources that have not as yet been considered in this light. A number of recent literary studies incorporate fictional texts into their analyses of early modern historical writing or explore the early modern tendency to fictionalize the past to make sense of or provide a context for the present. Others interrogate the role of language and texts, an especially important point given the rapid expansion of the print market and its close relationship with oral culture, in navigating the changing landscape of the early modern period.<sup>4</sup> These have gone a long way to revising current understandings of the role that fictionalizing plays in shaping early modern historical culture. Many of these sources focus specifically on England and investigate the ways in which that nation was shaped by its imagined history and then used it as a basis for asserting its place in the competitive world of the Continent. Some European literary scholars have also investigated the importance of imagined historical narratives in Spanish, French, and Italian literary constructions. The language of conquest and the inevitability of expansion have drawn significant scholarly attention, but the investigation of imagined constructions of particular historical events in literary texts has not warranted as much attention. This collection aims to correct the largely English and entirely literary focus of the existing scholarship by inviting literary scholars to examine the interactions between historical events and their imagined depictions and the potential for historical action contained within textual fictions. The chapters by Allan, Binda, Brayton, Davis, Dunn, Ketner, and Manes all provide useful new material to add to the existing scholarly discussion, expanding its geographic and intellectual borders and inviting new interpretations about the role of imagined history in literature.

Historians too have attempted to better understand the role fictions played—often embedded in "factual" narratives—in changing the way early modern people made sense of their worlds.<sup>5</sup> As was mentioned above, a great deal of attention has been paid to England, where the role of history in shaping English narratives about itself and actions—military, political, and intellectual—is quite evident. Often neglected in this arena of scholarship has been disentangling the sometimes knotted threads of historical event, fictional interpretations, and historical action



or consequences. It remains important to understand the historical consequences of imagined histories and the complicated rationales provided for specific imagined histories—especially in the face of evidence to support simpler conclusions. This collection speaks particularly to this gap in the literature, with the essays by McDougall, Allan, Manes, Park, and Kobayashi contributing new intellectual, geographic, and source material for understanding the stubborn insistence in the early modern world on producing and maintaining specific historical fictions as facts. McDougall, for example, uses this approach to understand the ways in which imagined histories shaped personal narratives about guilt and innocence for medieval French women accused of murder, and the relationships between social status and property ownership affected women's use of fictional histories in their legal narratives. The collection also expands the geographic coverage beyond the well-worked borders of England to include Europe, the Americas, and Asia, providing insight into the ways in which the expanding early modern world imagined and maintained histories to explain existing puzzles and sometimes create new intellectual problems. The chapters by Allan, Park, and Kobayashi develop cross-cultural exchanges and the ways in which they were recorded in historical fictions. One of the collection's most important contributions may in fact be the cultural exchanges brought to light across these chapters, all of which illustrate the global importance of fictional histories and the historical imagination in this period. The second contribution may be just as important. By combining historical and literary approaches, this collection demonstrates the complicated web of exchanges between imagined history—whether textual, visual, oral, or otherwise—and historical realities; whether as allegory or explanation, justification or cultural context, imagined histories played significant roles in early modern historical events and understanding. Each chapter develops a specific aspect of this theme, but read as a whole, these essays encourage a deeper understanding of the ways in which fictional histories interacted with specific actions in the early modern period. Ranging from new approaches to standard texts such as *Cymbeline*, to which Binda brings a complicated set of questions about time and identity, and the *Heptaméron*, to which Ketner applies ideas about gender, identity, and authorship, to objects such as maps, from which Park develops an elegant theory of interactions between European and Chinese mapmakers, and masques that produce their own historical reality, as Tuite so clearly establishes, this collection brings a range of theoretical approaches to bear upon the theme of fictional histories. The fictions created in museums and texts, performances and spaces comprise the evidence interrogated here, and the results are a deeper and broader understanding of the relationship between fiction and history in the early modern period.

In addition, this collection also brings historical fictions to the forefront in order to understand their important contributions to historical discourse, the historical imagination, and early modern historical culture more broadly. Even in the face of often compelling evidence, new texts tended to maintain older ideas, though sometimes qualifying their validity or casting them in new contexts. The fictional

imagination offers writers the possibility to re-envision the past in new terms or to open larger debates about the past for broader audiences. Through their imaginative reconstructions, they recover perspectives not acknowledged in other genres and articulate alternate social visions that challenge dominant beliefs and social structures. They even imagine anew the very foundations of their societies and construct new worlds that become part of the justifications for public actions and expand new arenas for intellectual work. The fictions investigated here range from errors of attribution to old ideas maintained in the face of new evidence to elegant literary constructions designed to enlighten readers about their own worlds. By taking seriously the first two categories, which David Hall once termed “detritus,” this collection breaks away from the historiographical tradition—which has, of course, become less determined in the last several decades—of only concentrating on the moments when early modern people “got it right.”<sup>6</sup> The period is rich with miscues that contributed to interesting ideas and areas of investigation that provide scholars with the opportunity to learn a great deal about the structure and content of early modern thought. In fact, the tenacious quality of some of the errors investigated in this collection reflects the durability of authority in early modern culture, and the chapters by Kavey, Park, and Kobayashi develop this idea and its effects. The struggle between authority and evidence in the early modern context has of course been developed in other scholarship, but this collection offers insight into it across locations and sources, contributing to a more complete sense of the ways it played out in texts and sometimes in life.

The collection considers the ways in which errors of transmission, chronology, and interpretation produced long-lived and influential fictions that had profound effects on early modern intellectual pursuits and understandings of their own and other cultures. The impetus to better understand their expanding world led to a profusion of work on other cultures, much of which depended on a small amount of knowledge and was characterized by initial assumptions that shed a great deal of light on the early modern intellectual framework. By delving into these assumptions, the essays included here develop a richer understanding of the ways in which early modern people approached new information, thought about the past and its relationship to their own existence, dealt with constructs of time and place, and attempted to integrate new cultures they encountered with existing theories of the world. The chapter by Allan, for example, provides an investigation of the Spanish empire in the New World and the reservations surrounding its relationship to the existing social order, while the chapter by Manes reflects the ways in which the social order of a small town was reconstituted by an elaborate fiction.

Given this ambitious reach and wealth of sources, these webs of connections spanning centuries and countries and resulting in seemingly unrelated chapters, you can imagine that organizing this collection has been an immensely challenging undertaking. Thinking about which chapters to group together forced me to consider my own assumptions about what “matters” when writing about imagination, fiction, and history—and to try to break free from my own disciplinary bonds. The groupings defined below are far from perfect; these chapters are as

messy and unwilling to settle into an assigned identity as the sources forming their foundations. But that is what makes this a collection to be read in pieces and as a whole, as Adam Fox tells us early modern readers actually read, allowing the reader to follow the threads s/he finds common across essays and, in so doing, to build a new framework of commonalities on which to base innovative thinking about early modern fictions and histories.<sup>7</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Imagination," *Oxford English Dictionary*, [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com), accessed January 25, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> "Fiction," *Oxford English Dictionary*, [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com), accessed January 25, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> "History," *Oxford English Dictionary*, [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com), accessed January 25, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Chloe Wheatley, *Epic, Epitome, and the Early Modern Historical Imagination* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011); Maria Del Sapio Garbero, *Identity, Otherness, and Empire in Shakespeare's Rome* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009); Goran V. Stanivukovic, ed., *Mapping the Mediterranean World in Early Modern English Writings* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Constance Relihan, *Cosmographical Glasses: Geographic Discourse, Gender, and Elizabethan Fiction* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2004); Donald R. Kelley and David Harris Sacks, eds, *The Historical Imagination in Early Modern Britain: History, Rhetoric, Fiction 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); John E. Curran, *Roman Invasions: The British History, Protestant Anti-Romanism, and the Historical Imagination in England, 1530–1660* (Wilmington: University of Delaware Press, 2002); Paula Blank, *Broken English: Dialects and the Politics of Language in Renaissance Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1985).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Tamara C. String and Marcus Bull, eds, *Tudorism: Historical Imagination and the Appropriation of the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); John N. King, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and Early Modern Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Helen L. Parish, *Monks, Miracles, and Magic: Reformation Representations of the Medieval Church* (New York: Routledge, 2005); James A. Knapp, *Illustrating the Past in Early Modern England: The Representation of History in Printed Books* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003); Daniel Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past, 1500–1730* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); D.R. Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

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PART I

Histories Written and Enacted





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Chapter 1

Shouting Distance:  
Local History and a Global Empire in  
Lope de Vega's *Famosa comedia del nuevo  
mundo descubierto por Cristobal Colón*

Madera Allan

In his dedication to the eighth *parte* of his collected plays (1623), Félix Lope de Vega argues that theater, which he equates with reality in a deft analogy that pairs written histories and paintings, is the most effective medium for conveying history. He says that history is richer and more immediate when performed and that, consequently, it can “renovar la fama [de famosas hazañas, o sentencias], desde los Teatros, a las memorias de las gentes donde los libros lo hacen con menos fuerza y más dificultad y espacio” (reawaken famous exploits and maxims in people’s memories from the stage, while books do the same less effectively in more space).<sup>1</sup> He argues, in essence, that theater unites its audience both culturally—by narrating a shared history—and physically, binding the crowd as a community. By favoring a presence-based genre, Lope implicitly endorses a particular view of the Spanish community—a political entity that came into being only in the late fifteenth century. The idea that, while history may be global, the experience of it is always necessarily local (whether textual and individual or aural and collective) is striking in the context of the first global empire. It is only more so when the event being commemorated is the birth of the empire: the unification of the Iberian peninsula and the immediate maritime expansion of the thus solidified state.

Lope de Vega’s *Famosa comedia del Nuevo Mundo descubierto por Cristobal Colón* (*Famous Play of Christopher Columbus’s Discovery of the New World*; henceforth *NMDCC*) portrays not a place, but a moment: 1492. Walter Mignolo has shown that Renaissance discourse was invested in the denial of colonial subjects’ coevalness. He argues that European powers justified colonization on the grounds of historical distance and the supposed need for the metropolis to bring the colonized into the present. Intriguingly, Lope de Vega’s treatment of both European and native characters belies their presumptive difference. While Lope’s natives might not have all of the things that the Spanish do, they are equally developed rationally and morally—they inhabit the same historical moment. They do not, however, share space. They are at once unusually like their Spanish

counterparts and impossibly distant—united by a shared present and separated by a lack of presence. This play dramatizes the ills of overextension, thus implying both that the crown should halt military expansion and that Spanish history is best spoken in the *corral*, where an actor's voice more than suffices to reach the public, rather than written in epics or chronicles. Neither Lope's only America play nor his only anti-epic, the *NMDCC* was Spain's first theatrical rendering of the encounter. In it, Lope sketches a vast empire held tenuously together by scraps of paper. He violates classical poetic precepts, thereby intimating that the Spanish empire does not fit a classical mold. In so doing, he critiques the overseas empire and celebrates the community fomented in the *corral* and reflected in the *comedia*, the form simultaneously constituted by and constitutive of Madrileño society's taste.

Lope's play is an unabashed poetic mess. It spans a decade, an ocean, and two conquests. Its stylistic crudity led neoclassical critics to dub it one of Lope's most "disparatada" (outlandish)—an impressive mantle given his copious and hasty output.<sup>2</sup> The judgment is well earned, however, as the play almost perfectly inverts Aristotelian precepts, announcing itself unequivocally as neither tragedy nor comedy, but rather *comedia*, that peculiar Spanish genre barely two decades old at the moment of the play's composition.<sup>3</sup> In the "Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo" ("New Art of Writing Plays in Our Times"), Lope says that he learned the classical precepts before turning 10, but that he willfully abandoned them in his own writing in order to satisfy a paying crowd accustomed to outlandish entertainment. Asked by a group of scholars to justify the decidedly non-classical practices of contemporary playwrights in 1609, Lope instead sketched what he called the "vil quimera de este monstruo cómico" (vile chimera of this comic monster) born of a plebeian crowd's appetites—a set of rules (in verse) to ensure not moral utility but rather audience interest.<sup>4</sup> To fill seats, he recommended that playwrights follow the custom initiated by the Valencian playwright Cristóbal de Virués (1550–1614) of dividing plays into three acts and prescribed specific meters for bellicose, amorous, and sentimental discourses; he admonished authors to mix tragedy and comedy and, above all, to delay resolution until the final scene because "en sabiendo el vulgo el fin que tiene, vuelve el rostro a la puerta y las espaldas al que esperó tres horas cara a cara" (once they know the ending, the common crowd will turn its face to the door and its back on what it has watched face to face for three hours).<sup>5</sup> The *comedia* that Lope codified was a cash cow at the turn of the seventeenth century, with two permanent playhouses in Madrid alone staging three or four new works every fortnight.<sup>6</sup> While the crowds paid well, they also made their opinions known. Lope's own protégé stopped writing plays for a time because he could not satisfy a crowd with such diverse tastes. Likewise, Miguel de Cervantes lamented that, while crowds had happily watched his first plays without throwing cucumbers, audiences accustomed to Lope had no interest in his later works. Instead, they wanted, as Lope specified, women in pants, plays on words, and a complete disregard for Aristotelian precepts. And as he said, "como las paga el vulgo, es justo hablarle en necio para darle gusto" (since the crowd pays for the plays, it's only right to give them the foolishness they want).<sup>7</sup>

Because of its artistic context, the play's outlandish elements have sometimes gone unremarked. The eminent historian and literary critic, Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo considered its unconventional form a perfect medium for conveying the historical truth of the encounter.<sup>8</sup> He defended its fidelity to chronicles by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo and Francisco López de Gómara and called it an epic in dialogue. For the greater part of the twentieth century, critics adhered to his vision, although the final decades saw a move to complicate ideological interpretations, primarily through rigorous philological investigation. As critics have focused on the play's source materials, they have tended to elide its formal properties, consequently overlooking the complex relationship between the quintessentially *comedia* presentation of historical events and the inherent critique of the same. Alessandro Martinengo identified several hitherto unrecognized sources for the play and showed how they determined its ideological trajectory. Others, most notably Robert Shannon, have questioned the play's relationship to history while maintaining its claim to epic status. Shannon has shown that the play departs from the chronicles in order to emphasize the messianic motive for conquest. Stating the matter somewhat more forcefully, Teresa Kirschner asserts that "in order to present a heroic Columbus, clean of all moral blemishes, and to defend the legitimacy of the conquest by evangelism, Lope recuperates, synthesizes or simply subverts the various historical materials."<sup>9</sup> Both Shannon and Kirschner read the play as a Christian epic with Christopher Columbus as its pious hero. In a similar vein, José Carlos Terradas argues that the play's trajectory is fundamentally providential. I concur that the play presents the discovery as ordained, but disagree with both the formal assessment and, ultimately, with the presumed endorsement of colonization.

While Lope penned several epics,<sup>10</sup> this play staunchly resists the genre's expectations. Structurally, it more closely resembles history, which, as Aristotle explains in *The Poetics*, differs from epic in that it "has to deal not with one action, but with one period and all that happened in that to one or more persons, however disconnected the several events may have been."<sup>11</sup> The *NMDCC* brings together two distinct, but contemporaneous, events: the reconquest of Granada, the last Muslim stronghold on the peninsula, and the discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus, both of which took place in 1492. The first two acts open with nearly identical scenes of wooing, civil war, and musical entertainment in Andalusia and the Caribbean. The similar staging of events transpiring on two continents seems to hint that Spain's initial success foretells similar accomplishments in the Indies. Ultimately, however, the comparison highlights the essential differences in the two campaigns, which in spite of certain superficial similarities remain purposefully both distinct and distant.

Even as the play unites *Reconquista* and conquest as paired movements in the realization of a Spanish empire, it undermines Spain's claim to dominion in the New World and thereby forecloses the possibility of an eventual Spanish triumph. The first act, which takes place in Europe, begins with Columbus seeking royal audiences. He meets with the king of Portugal, who mocks him cruelly, then

sends his brother to England while he approaches ambassadors and financiers at the Castilian court. He cannot meet with Ferdinand and Isabel, who are engaged in the protracted conquest of Granada. Instead, he shares his plans with various minor players at court only to be ridiculed by all, including a young page whose mockery undoes him. Defeated, he sits down to daydream and is whisked away—literally through the air—by his Imagination (personified) so that he can attend a mystical tribunal in which Religion and Idolatry present their cases for dominion over the Indies and are judged by Providence, who explains that God is helping Spain to recover its lost territories in Granada so that He might, with the crown's help, recover His own. Providence endorses overseas exploration; significantly, however, she says that the islands belong not to Spain, but to another litigant: *Religión*. As Terradas has argued, “la anexión de las Indias es ... más que una reivindicación territorial, una reivindicación espiritual” (the annexation of the Indies is ... a spiritual recovery more than a territorial recovery).<sup>12</sup> Thus the discovery of the New World is presented from the beginning as part of God's plan to reclaim his lost flock.

To be clear, the idea that God endorsed, or even facilitated, the discovery does not imply that Spain's subsequent colonization of the discovered lands is justified. It would have been impossible to argue in early modern Spain that the discovery should not have occurred—that the inhabitants of the New World should have remained ignorant of God. However, the colonization of *Ultramar* was hotly debated at all levels of Spanish society. Numerous clerics, scholars, and authors opposed the conquest on moral and economic grounds. Lope wrote at least four so-called “America plays.” In addition to the Columbian voyage, these dealt with Hernán Cortés's expedition in Mexico, the attempted conquest of Chile, and the recovery of Brasil from the Dutch.<sup>13</sup> *La conquista de Cortés* has been lost and the extant plays offer ambivalent accounts of Spain's overseas engagement.<sup>14</sup> The *Arauco domado*, which was based on two prior epics, is in many regards the least like the *NMDCC*, insofar as it is, for Lope, unusually classicist. Nevertheless, María Quiroz Taub has shown that it exploits the amphibious language typical of the *comedia* to critique the Chilean venture even while praising García Hurtado Mendoza. Thus the *Arauco domado* shares the earlier play's opposition to empire, if not its attack on genre. In her meticulous study of works that, like Lope's America plays, challenge dominant imperialist ideology through genre innovation, Barbara Simerka has dubbed a class of literature “anti-epic.” To this class pertain such varied works as Lope's *El premio del bien hablar* and Cervantes's much earlier play on the Roman siege of Numantia. Though formally diverse, the works all reshape epic in order to interrogate elements of early modern imperialism. Relative to most of the works that Simerka analyzes, the *NMDCC* is less subtle in its refutation of claims essential to justifying colonialism. Beginning in the early sixteenth century, jurists had attempted to justify dispossessing Indians of their property (land, goods, and bodies) on the basis of the latter's two supposed defects: sin and lack of reason. The Thomist theologian Francisco de Vitoria soundly refuted this argument by showing that there are no nations free of sin and that, *a priori*,