

Victoria M. Muñoz. 2021. *Spanish Romance in the Battle for Global Supremacy: Tudor and Stuart Black Legends*. London: Anthem Press

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Despite the extraordinary circulation of Iberian chivalric books in Europe over the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, both in their original language and in translation, they had traditionally been considered second-rank literature by a Quixote-centered English scholarship that had naturally assumed as theirs many of the attacks by Renaissance humanists on the genre. The Spanish origin of many of these texts, as Muñoz pointedly remarks, likely contributed to increase those same prejudices. For those reasons, her work is pertinent and useful. As the title suggests, this book's primary concern is the influence of Spanish chivalric literature on the discourse of the time that supported English colonial expansion at the expense of Spanish supremacy. Following in the footsteps of Barbara Fuchs (2013), Muñoz argues that many of the English writers she studies resorted to strategies such as occlusion, appropriation, or simply erasure to legitimize an imperial project that might rival Spain's (4). Muñoz reveals the Spanish traits in those English texts that aspired to build up an imperial national identity using literary works produced in enemy territory for completely different reasons. In doing so, she also explores the links between those procedures and the rising Black Legend against Spain generated in early modern England.

The book consists of six chapters, preceded by an introduction and followed by an epilogue, which are not arranged in chronological order. The author however examines major topics in the texts under study, paying attention to their possible contribution to the framing of the imperial myth. Though many of those texts are romances, she also studies plays, travel accounts, and chronicles to identify the writers' response to and use of the original Spanish colonial accounts—and imperial fantasies.

The first chapter opens with a reflection on Ramon Lull's *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, translated and published by William Caxton

in 1484 and 1485. Muñoz examines the reasons behind Caxton's appropriation of the ethos of the Spanish Crusades just when England brought civil war to an end and a new dynasty rose. She does not however explain why there were no further publications of any Iberian chivalric works until 1572, when Paynell's translation of the *Treasure of Amadis* was first printed.¹ Muñoz comments on the didactic influence of that work on contemporary men of "arms and letters" such as Philip Sidney. She also dwells on the use that courtiers such as the Earl of Essex or George Clifford made of the Amadis pattern to project a self-image of military and courteous worth in their confrontation with Spain. Nonetheless, that process of cultural appropriation was not always easy, as Muñoz makes clear in her study of Margaret Tyler's *The Mirror of Knighthood*. The Sun and Apollo myths were employed in the original to reinforce the image of the Spanish monarch's imperial rule. A few years later Elizabeth I would herself make use of the figure of Claridiana (in love with the Knight of the Sun) for her own royal iconography. The association of both characters with Apollo (the Sun god) and Diana (the Moon goddess) in the original romance makes it even more disturbing in the case of the English translation. Muñoz examines Tyler's strategies to deal with those contradictions, which were no doubt later reconciled, since the *Mirror* series became extraordinarily popular in England, even more so than in Spain.

The author devotes chapter two to the impact of Iberian romances and chronicles on seventeenth-century English drama. The mythical description of Insula Firme in *Amadís* helped Spanish historians explain the amazing nature of Tenochtitlán, so they could compare the sacred mission of the Crusades and the European conquest of America. English playwrights such as Shakespeare (in *The Tempest*), Davenant (in *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru*), and Dryden (in *The Indian Emperor*) espouse similar naïve, idyllic views of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica while they insist on the need for the English to attack the allegedly cruel and corrupt Spanish empire.

Chapters three and four largely discuss the mythical topic of an alleged virtuous English imperial rule by focusing on Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, here studied in relation to Spanish romances like Jorge

¹ See Sánchez-Martí (2021).

de Montemayor's *Diana* and the aforementioned *Amadis* and *The Mirror of Knighthood*. Spenser transforms Spanish romance heroines like Oriana and Claridiana into Gloriana, Belpheobe, and Britomart, who allegorically stand for Elizabeth I. In doing so, he is emulating a traditional practice in English poets such as Sir Thomas Wyatt, who had urged England to depart from Spain's execrable type of conquest and undertake a proper, ethical enterprise, such as a conquest led by the English. However, as Muñoz remarks, such an idealized ethos did not apply to the English campaigns in Ireland, justified by Spenser as fair actions "against Catholic aggressors" (82). By associating the character Redcrosse with English Saint George, Spenser seems to remark on the divine nature of the English empire as laid out in *The Fairie Queene*.

In this, he may have been influenced by John Harington's 1591 translation of *Orlando Furioso*, in which Charles V was represented by the sign of the holy cross, stressing his divinely ordained mission to conquer America. Ariosto's character probably did prompt the features of his main hero in book one, a character presented as an adventurer—Drake, Raleigh, Cavendish—ready to found a new England overseas. Muñoz argues that Spenser's very English Saint George was commonly accepted by early modern English historians and poets who traced the discovery of America back to the twelfth-century Welsh prince Madoc, thus appropriating the search for the classic "Ultimate Thule" that Columbus had previously interpreted as symbolizing Spain's global aspirations (129).

Chapter five explores the relationship between the actual and the fabulous in contemporary geography works and travel accounts that draw on Spanish chivalric discourse. Muñoz focuses on the Amazonians, characters that feature first in Montalvo's *Las Sergas de Esplandián* (1510; English, 1598). Rumors about the existence of Amazons permeated Spanish and English chronicles, mostly representing the "fantasy of martial and marital conquest of pagan women" (136). Nevertheless, Elizabeth I's representation as the peaceful empress who would never submit the Amazons (America) by force was also common in contemporary royal portraits, poems, and travel narratives, as Muñoz amply demonstrates here. The duality of Titania (the Faerie Queen) and Oberon (Phoebus) in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is considered too. The practice of relating

fantasy to the real world continued over the years. So much so that cosmographers like Peter Heylyn kept on naming fabulous lands from romances that could be found in remote parts of the world like Australia. Though Heylyn openly disregarded Spanish chivalric books as false, he did not hesitate to offer erroneous information on the actual location of Baja California—whose true peninsular nature had largely been proved by European explorers during the 1500s—, presenting it as an island, following the Spanish romance's tradition. Muñoz underlines Heylyn's association of this alleged island with Nova Albion, discovered by Drake in his circumnavigation in 1577–1580, whereby he asserted English claims to North America and the Pacific.

In the last chapter the author shows that the combination of misogyny and hispanophobia resulted in a progressive feminization of Spanish romance all through the seventeenth century. Romance reading was then gendered as feminine, and new romance English writers such as Mary Wroth or Margaret Cavendish, by focusing primarily on love, only confirmed what moralists had long feared, that is to say, the emasculation of the genre, interpreted “as a kind of Spanish invasion of England” (188). The author dates anti-Spanish and anti-chivalric feelings back to the early humanists, who regarded the Spanish books of chivalry as a clear threat to the Italo-centric basis of early modern European culture. She studies closely the arguments against the genre by Erasmus, Vives, De la Noue, Meres, and Jonson, among others, whom she partly blames for the increasing dismissal of Spanish romance as foreign and feminine. The impact of Cervantes's *Quixote* on Restoration England did ultimately turn the Spanish books of chivalry into a matter of satire and ridicule, necessary for English romance (or English prose fiction, in general) to establish its own generic identity.

Muñoz's essay offers a revealing multidisciplinary view of England's self-definition in and through romance literature. Her work contributes to render visible the intricate procedures through which the traits of Spanish chivalric culture were reinterpreted or simply erased in early modern England so as to symbolically replace Spain in the battle for global supremacy. However, if, as she comments, the rejection of *Amadis* (or Spain) was an essential step in that process of self-definition, it is the role of scholars to bring that Spanish heritage back to the surface for examination. Muñoz has done so remarkably well.

References

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