

Intricate Alliances: Early Modern Spain and England

Marina Brownlee
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey

In recent years, traditional and detrimentally monolithic conceptions of empire have been challenged by a salutary appreciation for the particularities of each geopolitical entity and its cultural articulations. This nuancing is stunningly apparent in the case of Spanish and English imperial pursuits, as J. H. Elliott, Henry Kamen, Anthony Pagden, and other historians have made clear. Each of these empires was a unique and mutable complex of objectives, challenges, and accomplishments, and the interactions of the two were also fraught with complexity and change.

Yet the dialogic context of Anglo-Spanish cultural articulations has been notably less studied. It is only now that this relationship—traditionally viewed as a one-way transaction from the perspective of either Spain or England, and from the adversarial to the emulative—is being explored in all of its complexity and dynamism. This special issue of *JMEMS* addresses the recently recognized need to engage this dynamic and unjustifiably understudied field of cultural comparison. The present volume grew out of a colloquium held at Princeton University provocatively entitled “Invidious Comparisons,” which called attention to the traditionally contrastive referencing by which the two imperial powers of early modern Europe—Spain and England—have all too often been regarded. This volume studies in a more nuanced manner and from a variety of methodological perspectives cultural constructions and parallel concerns common to both imperial ventures—as well as a number of inherent differences. What emerges from these essays is a greater appreciation of the “intricate alliances” that consistently informed the cultural interaction of these two empires.¹

The paradoxical interactions of Spain and England during the sixteenth century, England’s increased interest in Spanish culture, and history and politics when international relations had become dysfunctional

are studied by Alexander Samson. Translation of Spanish texts into English increased dramatically. Samson analyzes the complexity of England's reaction to Spain, stressing the need to distinguish between "cultural hispanophilia" and xenophobia, between the categories of political and religious issues, between elite and popular culture. Samson demonstrates why we must reject oversimplifications that have distorted modern assessments of Anglo-Spanish interactions as a result of an unwarranted focus on rivalry and contempt; as a corrective, he represents a delicate balance, setting out the intricate aesthetic alliances of admiration and emulation as a counterweight to the distortion inherent in the perennially invoked impulses toward rejection.

Complexities of identity in Spain and England inform Barbara Weissberger's essay. Noting the pan-European nature of anti-Semitism, especially in England and Spain with the examples of Chaucer and a virtually unknown narrative by a citizen of Toledo, Damián de Vegas, she focuses on the uniquely Iberian identity category of the converso, or converted Jew, and its religious, social, and racial implications. Given that conversos were Jews by blood, these converts were considered by skeptical Christians as dangerously susceptible to crypto-judaizing. Weissberger analyzes the alleged ritual murder of a child known as El Santo Niño de La Guardia in 1487, who was crucified in a reenactment of Christ's passion, as recounted by Vegas in his *Memoria del Santo Niño de La Guardia*. Weissberger compares this anti-Semitic tale to medieval Europe's most famous childhood ritual murder narrative, namely, Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*. Kristeva's theory of abjection provides an insightful framework for communicating the abjected converso's indelible, intricate blurring of the boundaries between Christian and Jew.

The contribution by Hilaire Kallendorf reveals an unexpected alliance as she undertakes the first comparative reading of the contemporaneously written adaptations of the Book of Lamentations produced by John Donne and Francisco de Quevedo. Her essay explores the reasons why each of these key poets of England and Spain is independently drawn to the biblical text. Rather than focusing on political or religious disparities of Protestant and Catholic perspectives, or on their unique personal circumstances, Kallendorf illustrates how these two writers of profoundly different formations employ a shared spiritual bond represented by Jesuit meditational techniques grounded in the senses.

Imaginative geopolitical acts form the basis of Roland Greene's reflections on Spain and England in Book V of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. The essay begins with J. H. Elliott's distinction between two models of distributing empire in a landscape, the *palus* (a man-made boundary between what

is inside and outside of a society), more favored by English colonial pursuits, and the *via* (a passage or way that connects societies) more favored by the Spanish. Greene provides a reading of Spenser's text that makes visible its privileging of geography over conventions such as plot and character. Invoking Spivak's recasting of Derrida's notion of *teleiopoiesis*, a poetic process that draws discontinuous and distant collectivities toward each other through acts of the imagination crossing time and space, Greene shows how Spenser negotiates history and power, the distance between metropole and colony, and how an act of resistance to Spanish authority in the Philippines conforms to the rebellions staged in Book V, yet carefully expresses it in relation to the *via* rather than the *palus*.

Taking as his point of departure the first English commentary on *Don Quijote*, published by Edmund Gayton in 1654, Nigel Smith illuminates Gayton's practice of fusing his commentary with Cervantes's narrative in order to lament the chaos of the English Civil War, a tragedy he sees as stemming from the illusions of romance and the chivalric ethos. Demonstrating the thoughtful recontextualizing of Spanish literature by this English commentator, Smith then discusses the wider English appropriation of Spanish literary works in the generation preceding Gayton, including Thomas Shelton's first English translation of the *Quijote* as well as James Mabbe's translations of Rojas, Alemán, and Cervantes. Smith links these writers by an "ideological Quixotism" in which the concerns of a repressed pro-Spanish Catholicism translate readily into subversive royalism in the context of the Civil War.

Anglo-Spanish politics and history are considered from a different perspective by Brian Lockey in his reading of Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, a play in which English royalists arrive to "liberate" the oppressed female subjects of Spanish-occupied Naples. Situating the play in the context of Spain's decline and the Anglo-Dutch wars, Lockey interprets *The Rover* as the product of notable transformations undergone since the Elizabethan period. Like other works by Behn, this play frames both imperial and colonial politics in the context of gender. Yet stock gender roles and the cultural stereotypes of Spanish oppressors versus English liberators become intriguingly complicated in ways that reveal Behn's desire to be allied less with nationalism than with radical and commercial cosmopolitanism.

The practices of a given culture—the imaginary national, social, religious, and ethnic factors that comprise the construction of cultural identity—are necessarily defined in relation to imagined and perceived others. Exploring the imitation and distancing at issue in the self-definitions con-

structed by Spain and England, Jacques Lezra affirms the intricate alliances at stake when either empire imagines itself necessarily against, with, or in imitation of the other. Lezra's analysis of Decker and Webster's *The famous history of Sir Thomas Wyat*, Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, and Dekker's *Magnificent Entertainment* underscores the persistently spectral constructions of the cultural self and other in the case of both England and Spain.

The "absent presence" of *Cardenio*, the lost play attributed to Shakespeare, is addressed by Barbara Fuchs in terms of its effects on our appreciation of Anglo-Spanish relations in early modern drama. Offering a reading of the *Cardenio/Double Falsehood* adaptation produced by Theobald in 1727, Fuchs points to the Shakespeare industry's misguided obsession with the missing original. More important than further speculation about the lost Shakespearean ur-text, or the quest to recover it, is the need to begin exploring the extensive use by English dramatists of the rich literary resources provided by Spanish authors. And rather than undertaking a "criticism of coincidence" that looks for textual parallelisms, Fuchs argues that scholars should focus on the intricate transnational factors at issue in the production of these intriguing yet understudied works, recuperating the notion of literary influence or transmission as ideological vectors.

Chocolate is considered by Edmund Campos as illustrative of the economic relationships developed between Europe and the Americas, from cacao's pre-Columbian function as an object of barter to its status as highly prized commodity for European consumers in a network of transatlantic trade. Campos charts the intricate array of ethnic, transoceanic, and international dimensions at issue in the case of cacao, both for the colonial subjects and for European colonizers, as well as the ways in which chocolate reflected colonial anxieties in both Spain and England. He also charts such perceptions as the "corporeality" inherent in the consumption of chocolate because it provided bodily nourishment and energy, a perception associated with the Catholic acknowledgment of the body or, by contrast, with an ascetic Protestant ethos.

We hope that the collective contribution represented by this volume will lead to further exploration of the rich field of Anglo-Spanish cultural interactions. It will take the kind of effort represented by these articles to move beyond stereotypes of Anglo-Spanish relations in addressing the emergence of new social, historical, political, and aesthetic possibilities for these two imperial powers in both Old World and transatlantic contexts.

37

Notes

It is a great pleasure to thank Michael Cornett, managing editor of *JMEMS*, for his exemplary editorial guidance and collegiality. I also thank David Aers and Valeria Finucci for their invitation to guest edit this special issue and for their engagement with the project.

- 1 For recent special issues of *JMEMS* that explore theoretical and cultural aspects of empire complementary to interests taken up by this volume, see “Decolonizing the Middle Ages,” ed. John Dagenais and Margaret R. Greer, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30.3 (2000), which in part looks at how the rivalry between the major colonial powers, Spain, England, and France, have shaped the study of medieval (and early modern) Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And see “Gender and Empire,” ed. Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34.1 (2004), which investigates how local or regional identity is co-constructed with the imperial, and how registers of gender intersect with and co-constitute discourses of empire. The essays in this volume also significantly deal with notions of cultural appropriation, which is studied in “The Cultural Processes of ‘Appropriation,’” ed. Kathleen Ashley and Véronique Plesch, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32.1 (2002); see especially Ashley and Plesch’s introduction (1–15).

