Territories of History
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INTRODUCTION

Many scholars have highlighted the richness of early modern writings on the New World, pointing to the complexities of narrative postures taken by writers who were often both participants and commentators on the project of discovery and conquest that Claude Lévi-Strauss once called humanity’s most “harrowing test.”¹ Part of contemporary interest in the textual wealth of the sixteenth-century chronicles of the Spanish Indies stems not just from the vast territorial expanse and novelty of the subject matter for European readers, but also from the ways in which these often strangely shaped writings are connected to the origins of modern forms of anthropology, ethnography, social and natural science, and also to the beginnings of the modern novel and of the discourse on universal human rights.² In this sense, it has become a critical commonplace that early modern Spanish authors frequently blur boundaries between history, fiction, myth, science, and philosophy, and that their informative reports and chronicles dispatched to imperial authorities are often packaged together with illusions of Eden or Atlantis, rumors of Amazons, and the hyperbolic self-fashionings of those who would seek to transform eyewitness experience into private or political gain.³

Yet alongside the often-commented-upon inventive and hybrid aspects of the early Spanish accounts of America, one also finds in some of these works a largely unrecognized but nonetheless vigorous spirit of reflection, debate, and experimentation that seeks to delineate methods and narrative techniques appropriate for the writing of history. The broad reach of Spanish imperial expansion in the sixteenth century brought with it intense intellectual controversy that sought to grapple with urgent questions of justice and

². Campbell, among others, has aptly described this phenomenon in her *Witness and the Other World* (166).
³. The continuing interest on the part of both historians and literary critics concerning the role of the imagination in these texts can be seen in the recent exchange between David Boruchoff, “The Poetry of History,” and Franklin W. Knight, “On the Poetry of History.”
rights, truth and falsehood, fact and “fiction.” While narrative credibility has always been a concern in historiography, given history’s particular claim to truth, the question of how to gauge textual reliability gains new relevance and urgency in works by authors such as Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo (1478–1557), Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1566), and Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1495?–1584). Oviedo and Las Casas discuss explicitly the role of imagination and fabrication in history, for the most part as a way of attacking the reliability of rival historians. Although neither one of these authors translated his insights into a consistent method throughout his voluminous writings, one senses in their works a concerted effort to chart boundaries in historical discourse. This critical line of thinking, I suggest, in itself tells us much about these early writers, about the competing pulls of science and religion upon them, and the ways in which they sought to bring the conceptual tools of sixteenth-century humanism to bear on the New World. In retracing their debates over the nature of historical discourse and the forms appropriate to it, one glimpses ways in which colonial experience appears to have challenged these authors and even inspired them to change some of the assumptions with which they had begun their monumental projects. Their critical commentaries on the writing of history are a treasure trove of insight; one finds in them an instance of the sort of innovative and creative thinking that Walter Mignolo has highlighted as stemming from cultures in conflict at the frontiers of empire.\(^4\) The importance of this fascinating trove of epistemological reflection and narratological consciousness derives from its ability to reveal conceptual fault lines, such as those in which superstition and magic are contrasted to more “rational” modes of analysis, as in the case of Oviedo, and those in which an inquisitorial rhetoric is harnessed to the critique of empire, as in the case of Las Casas. In the works of both of these authors, writing history becomes a contested site in which supernatural versus natural knowledge, and magic versus religion, are debated as signs of authorial reliability.\(^5\) In addition, their discussions have striking parallels to recent debates concerning the status of narrative in historical discourse.

Why, one might ask, has this wealth of ideas at the very foundations of the Spanish-American intellectual and literary tradition not yet been sufficiently recuperated? The answer may be found in the checkered reception of the writings of colonial Latin America. Neither Oviedo’s nor Las Casas’s

\(^4\) Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 5, refers to this as “border thinking.”

\(^5\) In a different context, Styers, in *Making Magic* (25–68), discusses the ways in which early modern writings on magic, witchcraft, and superstition are a reflection of a turning in Western culture toward modern forms of rationality.
major historical works were published in their entirety until the nineteenth
century, and the early positivist readers tended to view their works as docu-
mentary sources whose data needed to be extracted and recomposed into
more accurate accounts of events. Pioneering twentieth-century scholars
such as Ramón Iglesia, Edmundo O’Gorman, and Irving Leonard sought
to counteract this approach by reading colonial texts in a more holistic
fashion so as to understand the philosophical and cultural codes that shape
them. Small but significant changes in critical emphasis, which coincided
with the larger poststructuralist questioning of what constitutes “history,”
culminated in recent decades in a paradigmatic shift by which the histories
of the Spanish West Indies were recuperated and studied for the most part
by literary or cultural critics. While the postmodern critique of history’s tra-
ditional claims to truth, accuracy, and reliability, and the resulting emphasis
on the narrative aspects of the practice, have prompted a great deal of debate
within the discipline of history, the increasing inclusion of historical texts as
objects for literary study has in itself only more recently begun to receive in-
depth critical consideration. If the insights that grew out of the intellectual
climate of recent years have helped us to see the rich hybridity of colonial
works, they may also have obscured an important undercurrent within the
texts themselves that seeks to define the norms and boundaries of historical
writing.

In reconstructing the rich tradition of historiographical reflection in six-
teenth-century Spain and its colonies and arguing for its relevance to pre-
sent concerns, I have drawn on several quite distinct scholarly tendencies.
In its early stages, this project sought to investigate the expressions in New
World historiography of debates long considered fundamental to the literary
production of the Spanish Golden Age and was inspired by new historicist
trends. By undertaking a literary study of historiography, my work was
modeled on the rhetorical analyses of crónicas de Indias undertaken by schol-
ars such as Margarita Zamora, Rolena Adorno, and Enrique Pupo-Walker,
among others. And yet, my findings led me to adopt a methodological
approach that, to my knowledge, has not been used in the context of the
chronicles of the Spanish-American colonial period. The authors I found
most illuminating for understanding the reflection on the writing of history
in the context of the New World have explored, in one way or another,
the usefulness of narrative theory to gain precision on distinctions between

6. Iglesia, Cronistas; O’Gorman, Cuatro historiadores; Leonard, Books of the Brave; see also Frankl,
El antijoveo.
historical and fictive narratives. They include scholars as diverse as Félix Martínez Bonati, Dorrit Cohn, Gérard Genette, and Anne Rigney. At the same time, my work has been inspired by an emerging body of scholarship on early modern epistemology and empiricism that seeks to examine the interplay of science and religion in the production of knowledge during the early modern period, perhaps most notably represented by the work of Lorraine Daston. The formidable challenges presented to those who attempted to account for the history of the New World led them to far-reaching insights concerning the writing of history, and their critiques of humanist rhetorical models are often formulated in terms that evoke important political, religious, and scientific concerns.

The immediate context for Oviedo and Las Casas was the classical tradition as had been interpreted by Christian humanists. Aristotle, as is well known, wrote that history relates “the thing that has been,” and poetry, “a kind of thing that might be, i.e., what is possible as being verisimilar or necessary,” thus concluding that poetry is “something more philosophic and of graver import than history.” For Aristotle, then, history is mere chronology, a narration of singular events without any universal signification (“what Alcibiades did or had done to him”). What Aristotle denied to history, the humanists of the sixteenth century delivered. This reversal is perhaps best illustrated by the image, common to the rhetorical or preceptive treatises of the period, of the model inquirer—and his textual persona, the narrator—as a sage or wise man able to conjure up events and figures beyond his experience and to bring them to life in an exemplary narrative. History, for many humanists, becomes the supreme discipline, overshadowing—at least in theory—not just poetry but even moral philosophy. Indeed, it becomes a vehicle for teaching not just singular events but universal truths.

It is within the context of the humanists’ high standards and expectations for historical narrative and the historian that the early chroniclers of the Indies inscribed their work and endeavored to grapple with the challenging material of the New World. Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo in the Historia general y natural de las Indias (1535, 1557, 1851-55) and Bartolomé

7. Daston, “Historical Epistemology” and “Marvelous Facts,” as well as Pomata and Siraisi, eds., Historia: Empiricism and Erudition.
9. By “preceptive,” I mean the sort of treatises, commonly written by humanist scholars of this period, which sought to establish the “precepts” or rhetorical rules for writing history. I refer to them in Chapter 1.
de Las Casas in the *Historia de las Indias* (written 1527–60, pub. 1875–76) constantly measure their own histories (and those of others) against the daunting humanist norms, and yet manage to effect their own reversals, finding audacious narrative solutions to the monumental task of explaining the New World to the Old. Often, they frame their attempts to address the issue in terms of a conflict between history and “fiction,” and also in terms of concerns that continue to preoccupy theorists of narrative and historians alike: the nature of the truth represented, the qualities and perceptive abilities of the narrator, and the credibility of the narrative both in relation to the evidence and to the manner in which it is written. They also frequently formulate their critiques of their rivals’ works in terms that dismiss them as mere magical or superstitious practice.

In Chapter 1, “Historical Representation in the Spanish Humanist Context,” I examine the ideas of Juan Luis Vives (1492–1540) as a paradigmatic expression of humanistic thinking on the writing of history in the early modern period. While Vives’s contribution on the method and rhetoric for history has long been recognized, my analysis distances itself from earlier studies by focusing on the properly narrative framework he proposes. Writing in the 1530s, Vives endeavors in his *De ratione dicendi*, and in other texts in which he discusses the problem of history, to define the ideal qualities of the historian and of historical narration, and his treatise became a touchstone for later writers on the subject, both in Spain and elsewhere. His notion of an ideal historical narrative as seeking a mirrorlike objectivity congruent with the norms of probability and of Christian belief has its sources in Augustine and places a heavy burden on the historian. For Vives, the model inquirer is a humanist sage, a sort of “terrestrial divinity” who possesses almost supernatural powers to discern the meaning of events beyond his experience and to represent them as if directly perceived. In this sense, the humanist historian for Vives would seem to possess truly fantastic powers, which must logically derive either from divine inspiration or from the resources of the imagination. Vives links the notion of the historian’s unnatural perception to his problematic requirements that historiography reflect a vision coherent both with the norms of probability and with the divine plan, as well as to his suggestion that history might escape what he views as the “fallen” condition of human language, that is, the tenuous reliability of everyday discourse. In these idealizing tendencies, as well as in Vives’s interchangeable use of terms such as “lies,” “fiction,” and “lying histories,” one finds the sort of imprecision that has bolstered the critical commonplace of a confusion between “history” and “story” in the sixteenth century. Vives’s
notions of the sweeping perceptive powers of the writer of history resurface in later preceptistas such as Luis Cabrera de Córdoba and Jerónimo de San José, and in the ironic presentation of humanist notions on history and the historian in Cervantes’s Don Quixote.

In Chapter 2, “Conjecture and Credibility in the Historia general y natural de las Indias by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo,” I explore a number of ways in which Oviedo both bows to and reformulates the humanist norms in his work. In particular, I show how his innovative method is bound up in a critique of the idea of the historian as a distant sage. The notion of the historian (and his textual analogue, the author-narrator) as able to conjure up an image of the past beyond his experience and present it as if directly perceived, which has such positive connotations in the preceptive tradition, takes on a strikingly negative dimension in Oviedo’s work, and this author draws on the literature of reproof of superstitions to point to signs of an “unnatural” and therefore unreliable authorial perspective. Such a narrative stance employs a point of view that he associates not with the divine authority of the Christian sage, but with the more dubious conjectures of the armchair soothsayer. In asserting the importance of eyewitness experience in recording New World history, he arrives at the important view that reliability in historical narrative can be sought and measured by the author-narrator’s adherence to his own natural perspective, that is, by his clearly separating his own words and views from those of others. Oviedo’s stated refusal to mix his own words or perspective with those of the figures he seeks to represent has far-reaching consequences in terms of the structure (or lack thereof) of his work, as well as in the ambiguous notion of exemplarity it embodies. If the historian’s authority is necessarily constrained to his natural range of vision, then he operates under considerable restrictions concerning what he can or cannot assert as known and certain about the agents and events he represents. Although Oviedo does not always stick to his stated method, the systematic use of distinct perspectives and styles in his work amounts to a—for the most part—methodically sustained experiment in historical representation. By the end of his voluminous account, Oviedo takes his own method one step further, urging his readers to become, in effect, model historians, and encouraging them to actively engage themselves in assessing the value of the testimony of others and to sharpen their wits and guard against the deceptions inherent in everyday discourse. One finds a similar sensibility—albeit one expressed in terms free of the religious concerns of the earlier polemic—in the contemporary critique of poststructuralism by scholars of narrative such as Martínez Bonati, Genette, Rigney, and Cohn (more on this later).
Chapter 3, “Vision and Voice: The Historia de las Indias by Bartolomé de Las Casas,” looks at the efforts by this author to exploit and transform Oviedo’s methodological assumptions and versions of events, turning them against their author, as well as some of the problematic consequences (in epistemological terms) that result from this approach for Las Casas’s own adopted narrative point of view. Even as Las Casas adopts a prophetic tone that would seem to resuscitate the persona of the humanist historian, his polemics with Oviedo, while bitter, advance the understanding of boundaries in historical discourse. Amid the scathing criticisms that he often directs at his rivals, one senses an effort to gain lexical precision. In his critique of Oviedo’s theory of the New World as the long-lost Atlantis or Hesperides, for example, one finds a consistent effort to separate the material of classical “myth” from that of colonial history. Unlike merely entertaining fictions, Las Casas further suggests, “lies” in history belong to a more insidious form of deception, one that hints at a discrepancy between external utterance and inner belief. Las Casas devotes much of his history to exposing the “heresies” of his rivals, and in this accusatory mode he presents himself as able to detect through textual evidence the inner betrayals of others. In keeping with his goal of writing an orthodox version of New World history, he portrays himself as a sort of inquisitorial prophet who is able to decipher a divine plan. His curious representation of himself (often in the same scene) as both eyewitness and third-person actor constitutes a return to earlier historiographical practices, even as it brings into focus important questions of textual reliability. The widely varying range of what the narrator can perceive in the Historia de las Indias lends his work a peculiar shape, one that tries not only to conform to the compelling model of the Augustinian philosophy of history, but also to answer Oviedo’s competing narrative experiments. A study of the complex makeup of his narrative self points as well to significant distinctions on the problem of narrative reliability in historical versus fictional texts.

In Chapter 4, “History and Memory: Narrative Perspective in Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España” (1550–81, pub. 1632), I examine a work that, although written at the margins of both empire and humanist debates over the writing of history, presents similar narrative dilemmas. To a far greater degree than the histories of Oviedo or Las Casas, the Historia verdadera emits perplexing signals as to its own discursive character. The close study of the author’s narrative techniques enable us to describe with some precision the textual codes that have permitted his work to so readily be read as “literary” or even “novelistic.” In particular,
Bernal Díaz’s various uses of the present tense are a distinct feature of his work that signal problems of narrative distance and perspective, permitting the author in places to achieve remarkable insights into the minds of others, a characteristic commonly associated with modern works of fiction. In this sense, we can pinpoint moments in which Bernal Díaz’s narrative failures (in historiographic terms) constitute some of his most important literary achievements. At the same time, his treatment of character and his concern for addressing the narrative configurations of the existing historical tradition give evidence of a complex and properly historiographical project.

In focusing on debates over the “formal” and epistemological reflections of these sixteenth-century authors, I am not trying to suggest that they lacked doctrinal and political agendas, much less that their historical projects could be understood outside of the power struggles of the Spanish colonial enterprise in America. If I have not included a case from an indigenous perspective, it is not out of disinterest for those who wrote from a culturally different point of view, but rather because such an endeavor would substantially extend the reach of this project (and likely best be approached using a different theoretical basis). The writers I have included for study here all wrote roughly at the same time, participated in similar debates, and confronted similar narrative dilemmas, even as they found quite different solutions to their tasks. By limiting the study to a group of writers who shared some of the same predicaments as well as familiarity—great or minor—with the humanist program, I hope to show how the crisis in the humanist rhetorical model of history challenged authors as distinct in their training and background as Oviedo and Bernal Díaz.

This book intends to break new ground in two ways: by bringing to light a critical line of thinking on the part of early historians of the Indies, and by indicating the ways in which this line of thinking both anticipates and is clarified by more recent efforts to describe the logic and characteristics of historical writing as distinct from those of fiction. In recent decades, much of the literary study of historical texts has been inspired by the work of Hayden White and Roland Barthes, among others, concerning the role of narrative in historical writing. In its most extreme form, this approach has resulted in the reduction of history to rhetoric, as has been noted by Carlo Ginzburg, who also argues that the debate about truth that ensued from this approach is perhaps one of the most pressing intellectual issues of our times.10 Although Barthes and

White are usually associated with the “linguistic” turn in historical studies, the origin of this turn could be located much earlier, and Ginzburg himself has traced its philosophical lineage from the ancient sophists through the skepticism of Nietzsche. In the Anglo-American context, Nancy Partner points to the more recent shift by practitioners of the New Criticism of the 1950s, consisting of a movement away from searching for the “authorial” intention of the literary text to focus instead on the “textual” intention. She suggests that Barthes and later White essentially would extend these insights, which, in the context of New Criticism had been applied for the most part to fictive or poetic texts, to historiography in their attempt to conceptualize textual intention as the locus of the meaning not just in fiction, but in history as well.

White’s works in particular have played a central role in the narrative turn in historical studies of the last three decades, and any attempt to sum them up runs some risk of oversimplification, as Richard Vann has noted. Vann points out that White’s adoption of the essay form has meant that his positions are formulated in various ways throughout numerous texts, and that White himself has resisted requests for clarification on some of the evident ambiguities. A case in point is the notable imprecision with which White consistently has equated the writing of history with that of fiction. In an early essay, titled “The Fictions of Factual Representation,” which was included in The Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism (1978), he writes: “historical events differ from fictional events in the ways that it has been conventional to characterize their differences since Aristotle,” but goes on to argue that in their narrative dimensions, historical texts are essentially “fictions” that purport to represent historical facts. In another essay included in this collection, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” he suggests that the same set of historical events could serve as a basis for a narrative configuration that could be either tragic or comic, and that the mode of representation chosen by the historian is “essentially a literary, that is to say, fiction-making, operation.” Thus, historical narratives are “verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found and the forms

11. Ibid., 1–25.
12. Partner, “Hayden White,” 170–71, pointedly illustrates some of the “dislocations” that poststructuralism has brought to bear on the discipline of history.
of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences.” Elsewhere in this essay, he equates the “fiction” aspects of historical discourse with ideology. The ideological misuse of history is a concern to which White returns in “The Politics of Historical Representation,” included in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (1987), where, in addressing critics who have accused him of promoting a “debilitating relativism,” he seems to suggest that even factually inaccurate (and “morally offensive”) versions of history may play a valid role in nationalistic or revisionist politics. Although in this regard he professes concern for the need to “discipline” the role of the imagination in history to keep it in line with the “rules” of evidence, he states that in his or her inventive faculty, the historian is taken over by “an operation exactly like that of the novelist” at the time of writing his or her text. Although White somewhat tempers his use of terms such as fiction in later works, he continues to argue, in *Figural Realism* (1999), that literary and historical discourse “are more similar than different since both operate language in such a way that any clear distinction between their discursive form and their interpretive content remains impossible.” Variations in expression on this problem aside, White’s basic tenets boil down to the idea that historiography is a kind of rhetorical discourse more concerned with political effectiveness and persuasion than with truth, and that like fiction, it presents a self-contained textual world. Further, one could say that White’s own formulations of the problem—and many of the critical studies inspired by his model—are characterized by the prominence of the loose use of terms such as “fiction” and “rhetoric” in attempting to account for the role of narrative in historical writing.

If the broad effect of the narrative turn in contemporary criticism can generally be said to have led to a remarkable range of interdisciplinary work in the humanities in recent decades, the numerous and forceful critiques of White’s views have not always crossed traditional disciplinary divides. Several of these critiques have focused on White’s lack of terminological

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16. Ibid., 82 (emphasis in the original).
17. Ibid., 99.
20. For a sampling of critiques of White’s views, see, in addition to the articles by Partner and Vann cited above (and included in *History and Theory* 37, no. 2, an issue devoted to White’s legacy), Zagorin, “Historiography and Postmodernism.”
and conceptual precision. Ginzburg, for example, argues that the rhetorical approach in historical studies represented by White has engaged in a telling misunderstanding of the concept of “rhetoric.” This critic devotes a good part of *History, Rhetoric, and Proof* to recovering what he sees as the foundational concept in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*: the notion that evidence and proof are the definitive ingredients in the discourse of history. Ginzburg argues in essence that proof and evidence are in Aristotle the building blocks for all rhetorical discourse, including history, but that this central concept has been frequently obscured by the notion of rhetoric as a purely persuasive or politically expedient discourse only tenuously connected to the notion of truth. Likewise, literary theorists critical of White’s views have pointed to the wide range of meanings associated with the word *fiction*. In *The Distinction of Fiction* Cohn notes the commonplace contemporary confusion in the use of the term *fiction* to mean widely different things, from “untruth” to “all literature” or “all narrative.” She argues that this conflation of terms “is weighted with considerable ideological freight,” and is a product of the contemporary critique of the intellectual grounding of traditional historical practice.

So much has been written on this latest episode in the age-old quarrel between history and fiction that any attempt to summarize will fall short. What I would like to highlight here is the contribution of theorists who have argued that the concept of fictionality itself is crucial for understanding the nature of the boundaries between historical and fictive narrative. My own approach will highlight the ideas of Martínez Bonati, Cohn, and Rigney, whose diverse contributions in accounting for the kinds of imagination that go into historical writing have not, perhaps, been widely recognized. I share with them the idea that it is a mistake to equate the narrative or representational aspects of historical writing with the concept of fictionality. The notion that poetic or fictive discourse is distinct from other kinds of speech has, of course, ancient roots; in Aristotle it already appears under the clear-cut category of mimesis. In the context of twentieth-century debates, I will draw on Félix Martínez Bonati’s philosophical account of the distinctive character of fiction, which was first published in 1960. In this book, and in later essays on the subject, Martínez Bonati argues that fiction is logically and ontologically distinct from all other kinds of discourse. He posits

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23. Martínez Bonati, *Fictive Discourse*. 
that the imaginary quality of the fictive narrator and fiction’s freedom from referential constraints are the fundamental phenomena that distinguish fictive or poetic works from all other types of discourse. Both Rigney and Cohn expand on the implications of the concept of fictionality for understanding the workings of historical narrative. Cohn in particular draws on the work of Martínez Bonati to specify that, unlike the imaginary narrators of fiction, the writer of history tells his or her tale in his or her own voice, or at least takes responsibility for the account, and refers to events and individuals that by definition are assumed by both author and reader to have had an existence external to the text. In this sense, historical discourse is similar to other forms of nonfictional discourse and to many speech acts of everyday communication. This apparently simple distinction concerning voice has vast logical consequences for what the historian can assert as known and certain and, thus, for the range of his or her voice and vision and, in particular, for the portrayal of character or actors in history. Finally, Cohn echoes the sorts of concerns mentioned by Ginzburg in reminding us that unlike fictional narrative, which has been traditionally studied as having two levels (story and discourse), the territory of historiography is necessarily circumscribed by a third level largely irrelevant in the works of imagination: that of facts, evidence, sources, and their relationship to narrative.24 By juxtaposing the views of these scholars to those of writers from the conflictive sixteenth-century colonial context, I hope not just to excavate and illuminate an early and valuable critical tradition in Hispanic intellectual history, but also to update discussions of colonial Spanish American historiography with regard to recent theoretical discussions. Finally, I will examine the usefulness of models that, to my knowledge, have not been applied to the context of early modern historiography.

While the rhetorical analysis of the chronicles of the Indies has led to an important body of critical work, one to which in many ways I am indebted, it is still a relatively new field whose assumptions and practices have yet to be fully examined. My approach in Territories of History is neither to take on the problem of distinctions between history and fiction in a theoretical fashion, nor to suggest that such boundaries are entirely fixed. My study, rather, consists of an analysis of key sixteenth-century historiographical accounts of the New World, which themselves problematize the relationship of history versus fiction. By juxtaposing the insights of our own era to the epistemological and

narratological concerns that pervade these foundational texts of early modern Spanish colonialism, I highlight a common spirit of inquiry and, more generally, test the findings of recent critical efforts to characterize historiographical as opposed to fictional narrative. In their attempts at historiographical orthodoxy as well as in their innovative transgressions, the works under study here invite one to contemplate problems of boundaries in discourse. Given that the recovery of the *crónicas de Indias* as part of the “literary” Spanish American tradition has coincided with, or perhaps even anticipated, the larger post-structuralist questioning of what constitutes “history,” it is important to find such vigorous reflection, debate, and borderline experimentation within these foundational works themselves. In *Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative*, Roberto González Echevarría has argued that the “relationships that narrative establishes with non-literary forms of discourse are much more productive and determining than those it has with its own tradition.” 25 If this is indeed the case, it is all the more urgent to understand the particularly narrative characteristics of these “non-literary” forms, as well as the imaginative ways in which they become integrated in the literary heritage. In this regard, the analytical tools that help to underscore discursive boundaries may also assist in describing the manners in which the material of history becomes transformed both into fiction and into a literary tradition.
