

THE FOUNDING ABYSS OF COLONIAL HISTORY:
OR “THE ORIGIN AND PRINCIPLE OF THE NAME OF PERU”

MARK THURNER

Peru as a name and as a social fact . . . does not appear modestly or imperceptibly . . . [She] was . . . born of blood and tears in an abyss of history, with a loud crash that shook the world.
—Jorge Basadre¹

ABSTRACT

The name of “Peru” and the entities and beings it names first appeared “in an abyss of history” on “the edge of the world” in the early 1500s. In this essay I ask what hermeneutical truths or meanings the strange event that made the name of Peru both famous and historical holds for—and withholds from—any understanding of the meaning of colonial history. By way of a reading of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega’s rendering, in *Los Comentarios Reales de los Incas* (1609) of “the origin and principle of the name of Peru,” I suggest that Peru’s name is itself an inaugural event that marks the founding void or abyss of colonial and postcolonial history, which is to say, of modern global history. This *événemential* void is not unoccupied, however. It is inhabited by another founding, mythopoetic figure of history: “the barbarian” whose speech is registered in the historian’s text.

Keywords: historiography, colonialism, theory of the subject, Peru

I. INTRODUCTION

The Mexican philosopher of history Edmundo O’Gorman once pointed out that to get at the meaning of history it was first necessary to unpack the *topoi* of historiography. It is perhaps not surprising then that the significance of the event of naming Peru (or, as I prefer, of the name-event that Peru is) would be rendered opaque by two formidable *topoi* of the historiography: “the discovery of Peru” and “the conquest of Peru.” This irony of history—the cumulative operation by which the hefty tomes of historiography tend to obscure the immediate meaning of historical events—was first conceptualized by O’Gorman in his erudite investigations into the *topoi* of “the conquest of Mexico” and “the discovery of America. O’Gorman’s brilliant answer was eventually summed up in the title of his thin book, *The Invention of America*. For O’Gorman the “invention” named “America” was not a mere “fable” or fabrication but instead a deep “hermeneuti-

1. Jorge Basadre, *Meditaciones sobre el destino histórico del Perú* (Lima: Huascarán, 1947), 104-105.

cal necessity” and “truth” that demanded to be interrogated before any true historical understanding of the meaning of the name-event could be had.

O’Gorman’s investigations in the early chronicles revealed that the notion that “Columbus discovered America” had been based on the “legend of the anonymous navigator.” According to this legend, Columbus was tipped off by an unknown seaman who knew a secret route to strange new lands to the west. This account, which had gained much favor among the unschooled and learned alike, was on the surface apocryphal, for it was known that Columbus did not in fact seek to discover new lands; he merely sought a direct route to the Orient. Why did this apocryphal story hold sway over so many, and what does the fact that it did tell us about the notion of “discovery?” To merely dismiss the story as “fable” or “ignorance,” as many modern historians now did, would be to fall into the sterile methodological dogmas of a “historical science” that could admit only one “historical truth.” The Rankean practitioners of historical science had busily buried, under volumes of turgid and denunciatory prose, the “plural hermeneutical truths” of that world-historical event, in effect creating their own “fables.”² First among these “fables” of science was the measure of what constitutes “historical truth” (*verdad histórica*) and “historical fact” or “historical event” (*hecho histórico*).³ For O’Gorman, such absolute measures or judgments as “ignorance” versus “truth” got in the way of “historical understanding” or “comprehension” (*comprensión histórica*). Such comprehension was based not on these easy contrasts but on the recognition that human truths may or may not be “recognized” (*reconocer*), that is, that one may “prefer not to recognize” (*desconocer*) a certain truth in lieu of another, and that such preferences of truth shifted over time. For O’Gorman “truth” was not “an eternal and passive possession” but “a demanding lover that, in effect, requires of us a continuous effort of adherence so that she will remain ours; it requires not only an initial acknowledgment (*conocimiento*) but repeated re-acknowledgment” (*re-conocimiento*).⁴ The historical comprehension of “the legend of the anonymous navigator”—or indeed any past historical event or fact—lies in this crucial interpretive distinction between “ignorance” and “the preference not to acknowledge.” Those early chroniclers who vouched for the legend were not ignorant—as modern historical scientists claimed—of Columbus’s “Asian objective”; they simply preferred not to acknowledge it in favor of another truth that was the consequence of his journey: the discovery of “new lands.” The focus on this other truth at that time made the “legend of the anonymous navigator” a “hermeneutical necessity.” Over time, men adhered to this preferred or beloved truth, so that the “new lands” became the mythopoetic sustenance or hermeneutical truth of “our American being” (*nuestro ser americano*), understood as a projection of (European) man’s “destiny” to “create new worlds” in his own image.⁵ In short, the truth of “America” first had to be “recog-

2. For a more detailed and trenchant critique of Rankean “historical science,” see O’Gorman’s *Crisis y porvenir de la ciencia histórica* (Mexico: Imprenta Universitaria, 1947).

3. The semantic domain of the Spanish term “hecho histórico” is wide, and may include the English notions of both “historical fact” and “historical event.”

4. Edmundo O’Gorman, *La idea del descubrimiento* (Mexico: Centro de Estudios Filosóficos, 1951), 379-380.

5. O’Gorman always uses the term “man” (*hombre*) and never “people,” and in most cases it

nized,” within existing frames of reference, as a corporeal or continental “entity,” after which her “being” could be lovingly sustained as a spiritual and corporeal realization of man’s inventive desire (again, O’Gorman posits the male Western being as a universal category of mind whose destiny is to create) to adhere to those things and beings that he creates in his own image.

O’Gorman’s concept of “invention” was ontological and historicist or what he called, after José Ortega y Gasset and his teacher José Gaos (who translated Martin Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* into Spanish), “historiological.” The “entity” and “being” of “America” is eventually revealed to be “the country of the future” in which man realizes his humanist “destiny” to create. This is so because “true history” consists of the historical ontology of ourselves, but also, and this most notably, because for O’Gorman “things and events in themselves are nothing; their being depends upon the meaning that is ceded to them by the frame of reference of that image of reality that prevails in that moment.”⁶

This recognition of and insistence upon the nothingness of events, however, raises another question. O’Gorman’s preoccupation with the “invention” of America as constitutive of its “being” points to the abyss of the historical subject, that is, to the immediate nonbeing of things and events that is filled and refilled by the loving meanings attached to the proper names that, in turn, lend meaning to those events and so make them into proper beings or subjects of history. Behind this operation, however, lies the *mise-en-abyme* of the colonial condition, that is, the master or naming subject whose name is always already the colonizer’s projection of desire but at the same time also something else that escapes that desire: a void that is also a mirror. This void that mirrors both invites and eludes the gaze of those who name and create, in effect turning that gaze back upon them in uncanny ways. O’Gorman’s brilliant hermeneutical re-reading of the topos of “discovery” thus elicits another level of questioning and reading, which may be summarized as follows. What is the not-yet-named “it” that as a void or abyss demands to be assigned a lovingly gendered pronoun (“she”) and a proper name (“America”) in the ontological order of “continents” so that “historiology” or “historical comprehension” may perform its necessary hermeneutic critique? To put it more simply: What’s in a colonial name that is lovingly made “ours?” This, I suggest, is the founding, ambivalent question of all colonial and postcolonial history.

II. THE NAME OF PERU AS TRACE OF THE ABYSMAL EVENT

This ambivalent question is both historical and theoretical; in my reading it points to a strange kind of subject-generating event or set of events that is both rendered invisible and revealed by the *topoi* of “the discovery of Peru” and “the conquest of Peru.” This event was first exposed in illuminating ways by Inca Garcilaso de

is clear that he means European or Western man; that is, here “man” signifies a certain civilizational and/or creative state of being and becoming. Edmundo O’Gorman, *La invención de América: Investigación acerca de la estructura histórica del nuevo mundo y del sentido de su devenir* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995), 152.

6. *Ibid.*, 57.

la Vega's brilliant exegesis, related in his *La Primera Parte de Los Comentarios Reales de los Incas* (1609), of "the origin and principle of the name of Peru." Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's history is widely recognized as a classical text in the Hispanic literary tradition, and it has also long been read in Peru as the founding "Peruvian history."

To make sense of the writing or inscription of the founding event of naming "Peru" that, I will argue, both preceded and succeeded the *topoi* of "discovery" and "conquest," I turn to concepts proposed by Alain Badiou in his *Theory of the Subject* and *Being and Event*. Badiou agrees with the "negative" philosophical and linguistic notion that what lies behind a proper name is always the void or abyss.⁷ Nevertheless, for Badiou there must also be an *événemential* means by which the proper name comes to "mark the void" and thereby "found" a singular historical subject.⁸ Following, or rather reading into, Peruvian historian Jorge Basadre's notion, proposed in the 1940s and quoted in the epigraph to this essay, that the "name and social fact of Peru" was "born in an abyss of history," I call this means by which a void is marked and becomes a subject "the abysmal event" that, in this case, gave birth to the historical subject named "Peru." Admittedly, the event by which the proper name of "Peru" came to mark the abyss of conquest was in part a "projection" of colonial desire à la O'Gorman, but it also registered something akin to a Nietzschean "abysmal experience" whose colonial trace was left in language, and which Inca Garcilaso puts to critical or reflexive work in his history. As Elías Palti has argued, such an abysmal experience or "disaster" may be seen to characterize the ongoing "crisis of Marxism" in post-Marxist thought, but it may also, Palti adds, denote even more catastrophic events such as the Aztec reception of "the conquest of Mexico."⁹ The abysmal experience disrupts the intelligibility of signs and opens a gaping or, in Badiou's terms, nameless "ontological fissure" or "destructure" in the existing structure of experience and discourse. This fissure is for Badiou the site of "the mark" or the proper name, and is thus prior to what I will call, after Basadre, "the baptismal event."

A baptismal event occurs after the subject is named, and is thus a "secondary event." In the baptismal event the subject becomes a historical subject by virtue of an interpretive reception or recognition that confirms its name and elicits an adhesion or belonging to its "promise" or "possibility." This secondary event is what O'Gorman describes as a prolonged process of "invention" and "recognition," but which in Badiou's system would, if I read him correctly, qualify as an "event-to-come" or multiple "second event." Actually, Badiou characterizes this second event as at least two suturing "interventions of interpretation" where the

7. Giorgio Agamben traces this notion of the subject as void back through the traditions of negative philosophy (Hegel, Heidegger) and theology to Aristotle. See Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, transl. Karen E. Pinkus and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

8. See Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), particularly Parts I and V. My reading here draws upon the close analysis of Elías José Palti, "Poststructuralist Marxism and the 'Experience of Disaster': On Alain Badiou's Theory of the (Non-)Subject," *The European Legacy* 8:4 (2003), 459-480.

9. Elías José Palti, *Verdades y saberes del marxismo: Reacciones de una tradición política ante su "crisis"* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005).

second intervention establishes the meaning of the first for that subject that is thereby constituted in the interval between the two successive events. Modifying Badiou's scheme, I will call the second of these suturing interventions "the tertiary event" since, in this case, it is historiographical, that is, compiled from "primary" and "secondary" sources. I suggest that this tertiary historiographical event is on the order of what Roland Barthes has called the "inaugural performance" of the historian, who thereby endows his history with a durable mythopoetic structure.

In Badiou's scheme, if a historical subject is to be born and so "leave its mark on history" it must first await the interpretive news of the reception of its proper name. My reading begins with this secondary, event-making news, that is to say, with the "second event" that retrospectively confirmed the first. This news was resounding, even euphoric: "her name resonated universally as a fascinating announcement of riches and well-being."¹⁰ In sixteenth-century Europe, the very name of "Peru" could evoke dizzying images of El Dorado. The proverbial *poseer el Perú* (literally, "he's got Peru") was reserved for extraordinarily wealthy and adventurous men of great influence, and it anticipated by more than two centuries that other famous and more remembered Spanish proverb about the New World: *hacer la América* (literally, "do America"), that is to say, get rich abroad.

Even more exhilarating was the exclamation, still heard in Peru today, of *¡Vale un Perú!* (That's worth a Peru!). This phrase initially evoked Captain Francisco Pizarro's fabulous "gift" of "Peru" to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, who of course also held the title of Charles I of Castile. Notably, Pizarro's gift to the Emperor was made possible by an earlier one: the "king's ransom" or "palace full of gold" rendered to Pizarro by the captive Inca Atahualpa ca. 1533. In his founding "general history" of "the conquest of Peru" Inca Garcilaso de la Vega cross-checked and quantified Atahualpa's ransom (his figure was slightly lower than Jesuit Padre Blas Valera's *kipu*-based accounting of 4,800,000 ducats) not only as the greatest the world had ever seen but as the principle material cause of Spain's greatness for, the first "Peruvian" historian noted, it was well established—and he reviews all the evidence—that prior to the conquest of Peru "Spain had little money." At the same time, the Inca's prideful reckoning of Atahualpa's record-breaking ransom is an exercise in a work of mourning that is a colonial critique and, in the eyes of those later "Peruvian" reading subjects whom Inca Garcilaso's history finds, a melancholy anticipation of a shared postcolonial misery. Writing some seventy years after the event, Inca Garcilaso was obliged to note that Atahualpa's unprecedented ransom now seemed like a paltry sum to his fabulously rich Spanish readers, since "10 or 12 million ducats worth of gold and silver now sail up the Guadalquivir each year, sent by my land to all of Spain, and [from there] to all of the Old World." Peru's gold and silver, he now added, had "revealed herself to be a cruel stepmother (*madrastra*) to her own sons, and the passionate mother of foreigners."¹¹ The tense resonance of riches with ransom thus struck that dystopian chord of a world-upside-down, of a cruel but unavoid-

10. Jorge Basadre, *La Promesa de la Vida Peruana y otros ensayos* (Lima: Mejia Baca, 1958), 14.

11. Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *Segunda Parte de los Comentarios Reales de los Incas o Historia General del Peru* (Cordova, 1617), Libro I, Capitulo XXXVIII, folio 31.

able fate. Peru's riches had step-mothered Peruvians and mothered Europeans. Peru would become an "impoverished man" "atop a pile of gold" whose profits were destined, cruelly but unavoidably, to benefit others elsewhere.

Since Inca Garcilaso's early reckoning, the "king's ransom" of the Inca cannot help but evoke the step-mothered subject of a colonial history whose author must share a similar condition. Inca Garcilaso's *Royal Commentaries* is itself a "king's ransom" of another kind, for it would purchase in the world of letters eternal riches of the soul for living and future Peruvians; at the same time, however, this ransom of the soul would recognize the loss and curse of the "riches of the body" remitted to Spain and Europe. And so the literary "ransom" of the Peruvian soul paid in the pages of history would yield the ample compensation of the scar. "Peru" would come to be about much more than the fame and curse of gold and silver. Henceforth, "Peru" would be borne on the scarred wings of colonial history—wings granted not by Heaven but by the "Inca" historian-in-exile.

As it happened, colonial events gave him his torn wings, too. At the age of twenty-one Gomez Suarez de Figueroa (1539–1616) sailed for Spain because he had no future in war-ravaged Peru, at first to take up the heroic life of arms in the service of the Emperor of Christendom but later to assume a frugal life of monkish study on his uncle's estate near learned Cordoba, whereupon he elected to become, by virtue of an old Spanish custom, "Inca Garcilaso de la Vega."¹² This Andalusian, metropolitan exile (*destierro*) of the pen and the name produced a critical and persuasive work of soulful mourning. The "measure of what we have lost" is here painfully personal, for nearly all of Inca Garcilaso's beloved royal kinsmen on his princess mother's side, he relates, were slain. But what is personal (exile) and royally familiar (death) is now "translated as the collective lament of a people."¹³ This royal lament-in-exile founds a beloved loss, a subject of history. As Freud saw, the work of mourning consists of "recovering from the loss of a love object by withdrawing libido from that object and restoring it to the subject, [that is] by withdrawing it from them, and restoring it to us."¹⁴ Inca Garcilaso's writing will transfer the object of childhood love (an abandoned "patria") from the past Incas to the new "Peruvian Empire" and the "Peruvians," thereby restoring "to us," from that which is dead and left behind, a history with a brilliant future (even if its ultimate destiny was, like all other destinies of the age, the coming reckoning of the Last Judgment). This founding colonial/metropolitan

12. Inca Garcilaso de la Vega was baptized Gomez Suares de Figueroa after his great grandfather. He was the son of the Spanish captain Sebastian Garcilaso de la Vega y Vargas and the niece of the Inca Guayna Capac, baptized Isabel Suares Chimpu Oollo. Since Crown policy prohibited interracial marriage, Sebastian later married the Spanish woman Luisa Martel, and arranged Chimpu Oollo to be joined with the Spanish commoner Juan del Pedroche. Gomez Suares de Figueroa sailed to Spain in 1560, adopting his father's surname and the titular "Inca" in 1563. He did not fare well at the Spanish court, however (his father was accused of aiding the wrong side in the civil war in Peru), and he retired to his uncle's estate near Cordoba to write his histories and take up a clerical life. Some scholars have suggested that Gomez Suarez favored his father's surname for its literary prestige: Garcilaso de la Vega (1503–1536) was a celebrated Golden Age poet-soldier.

13. Roberto J. Gonzalez-Casanovas, *Imperial Histories from Alonso X to Inca Garcilaso: Revisionist Myths of Reconquest and Conquest* (Potomac, MD: Scripta Humanistica, 1997), 114.

14. Jean-François Lyotard, "Universal History and Cultural Differences," in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 316.

or antipodal history is marked by the trace of not just any exile or ambivalence, however. This exile builds a colonial Renaissance bridge of words across the spatio-temporal abyss that separated the ancient from the modern, the Old World from the New, “Kings” from “Incas,” motherland from fatherland, and “Europe” from “the Indies.” In the transit, *Los Comentarios Reales* inaugurated a new kind of modern history that would be written in the wake of empire, and that we now call “Peruvian history” but which, more generically, may aptly be called colonial and postcolonial history.

¡Vale un Perú! is thus also “the measure of what we have lost” or “the distance we have fallen” if not “the curse of Peru.” Ravaged by that storm of plunder that fills and tatters the bent-back wings of the angel of colonial history, Peruvian Jobs have wondered aloud and in print if Peru would not have been better off without Incas and without mountains of gold and silver.¹⁵ That “Peru” should evoke riches, ransom, and loss is so not only because Pizarro’s marvelous “gift” to Charles V promised an unparalleled flow of ships laden with gold and silver to the Crown of Castile and to Christendom. More significant for the annals of history was the “fact” that Pizarro’s gift of “Peru” included a retrospectively imputed sovereignty invented by early chroniclers and historians. The Incas would be portrayed in the earliest accounts of “the conquest of Peru” as the sovereign “Lords of the Land,” as the natural “Kings” of otherwise barbarian subjects, and there is no doubt that Inca Garcilaso de la Vega’s dynastic history of the Incas confirmed this process of invention by which Incas became history’s utopian “Kings of Peru.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, this invention had at its heart the figure of the barbarian. Pizarro’s “gift” offered a fictive “throne” of “Peru” to the Emperor of the World, but it was historians’ narrative or hermeneutical need to write a story of sovereign subjects that made it so. Historians’ need to narrate a sovereign subject was here both imperial and colonial: indeed, the historian-in-exile Inca Garcilaso wedded these in an “antipodal” fashion, that is, with one foot on either side of the orb. This antipodal gesture made both colonial and postcolonial history possible. In this gesture the Inca historian needed both the barbarian and the void.

The (so far) unending paper life of that void or “abyss of history,” in this case properly Peruvian by name, was inaugurated by the Inca with these memorable words:

One [of the ships sent from Panama by Basco Nuñez de Balboa] sailed farther than the others down past the equator, navigating along the coast, and as it went on its way it caught sight of an Indian fishing at the mouth of a river like those many rivers that enter into the Ocean there. . . . The ship passed before the Indian. . . . By way of signs and words the Spaniards . . . inquired of him: “What land was this and what was it called?” By their facial expressions and gestures the Indian understood that they were questioning him, but he did not understand *what* they were asking him, and to those whom he understood to

15. My reference here is of course to Walter Benjamin’s unforgettable image. Benjamin’s European angel of history is hurled backwards into the future by the storm of progress that gathers in her wings, and so she can only look back over the wreckage that progress has wrought. In colonial history this wreckage is often reckoned not as progress but pillage. In colonial history progress—or, rather, providence—exerts any compensatory effects not in the material but in the spiritual or soulful domain.

16. The foundational account is Francisco de Xerez, *Verdadera relacion de la conquista del Peru y de la provincia del Cuzco llamada la Nueva Castilla* (Seville: Casa de Bartholome Perez, 1534).

be questioning him, responded he with haste (before they could do him harm) by naming his proper name, saying “Beru,” and then he added another [name], saying “Pelú.” What he meant to say was: “If you ask me what I am called, then I call myself Beru, and if you ask me where I was, then I say I was in the river. . . .” The Christians understood in accordance with their desire, imagining that the Indian had understood and so responded appropriately, as if he and they had spoken in Castilian [Spanish]. Ever since that time, which was in 1515 or 1516, the Spaniards—corrupting both names as they have almost all of the words they take from the language of the Indians of that land— . . . have called that rich and grand Empire . . . that the Inca Kings . . . had conquered and subjected, “Peru.” . . . That is the origin and principle of the name of Peru, so famous in the world, and rightly so, for she has filled the world with gold and silver, pearls and precious stones.¹⁷

For the bicultural Inca the name of Peru was both obviously erroneous and manifestly true, for it was a predictable corruption of words made irresistibly true by the history of the usage of words. By the early 1600s the origin of the name of Peru had become confused by the corruptions of translation, the repetition of error, and a widening ignorance. Among the several early accounts of the origin of the name the most notable and informed was that of the “ghost chronicler” and intrepid mestizo Jesuit, Father Blas Valera.¹⁸ Blas Valera had argued that the name was not “proper” to Peru but instead a Spanish corruption of the Quechua term *pirua* (granary). Despite his great admiration for Blas Valera’s historical writings (apparently the lost source of much of his own history), Inca Garcilaso rejected this view on historical and linguistic grounds. *Pirua* could not be the origin of “Peru” since at the moment of its coinage (ca. 1515 or 1516) the Spaniards had not yet penetrated into the Inca-ruled, Quechua-speaking interior and so could not possibly have encountered this word or the thing it named. The first boatloads of Spaniards, the Inca noted, had landed in the northern reaches (today southern Ecuador and northern Peru) of the “barbarian” Yunga-speaking coastal region.¹⁹ Shifting the ground of the controversy to the linguistic probabilities at hand in the historical moment of the first act of utterance of the name, Inca Garcilaso offered an alternative account based, apparently, on his second-hand knowledge of the Yunga (lowland) tongue. Since “in the [Yunga] language of that distant coastal province, Pelu is an appellative name that means river in general,” and since historical accounts suggested that the Spaniards had come ashore near the mouth of one of these rivers, it was likely that this Yunga name for river was implicated in the event of Spanish discovery. But that was insufficient proof, for how could the Spaniards, unschooled in Yunga, have known that “river” was called “Pelú?” At the mouth of some such “Pelú” the Spaniards had therefore encountered a stunned, Yunga-speaking “Indian” (*indio*) barbarian and taken him aboard. The proper name of this barbarian was “Beru.” In short, “Peru” was, in the first instance, the *événemential* conjuncture of the utterance of the words

17. Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *Primera Parte de los Comentarios Reales de los Incas* (Lisbon, 1609), Libro 1, Capítulos IV-V.

18. On the life of Blas Valera, see Sabine Hyland, *The Jesuit and the Incas: The Extraordinary Life of Padre Blas Valera* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

19. This is Inca Garcilaso’s contention, but other contemporary accounts of first contact place the mythical river of “Viru” or “Veru” or “Pelú” closer to Panama, where Yunga was not spoken. The Inca’s version has become the accepted truth.

“Beru” and “Pelu” in the mouth of “Beru” (the barbarian) in the mouth of “Pelu” (the river’s mouth at the sea) in the ears of wayward Spanish navigators.

As I have suggested, this conjuncture would embrace a second and even third event: the enthusiastic reception of the name in Europe, followed by the exegetical proof, offered by Inca Garcilaso, that the name made sense in historical and linguistic terms. Now following Blas Valera and yet another giant of Jesuit Peruvianist scholarship, Father José de Acosta, Inca Garcilaso confirmed that “in Peru” the names “Peru” and “New Castile” (in the early sixteenth century these names were often applied interchangeably, although the measurable dominion granted to Captain Pizarro as the Emperor’s *adelantado* and named “the province of New Castile” was rather less expansive than the imaginary Peru²⁰) were uttered only by Spaniards. Although “Peru” was the preferred name in Europe, the name of “Peru” was still uncommon among the provincial natives sixty years after contact,

because in their language they did not have a generic name for the union of the kingdoms and provinces of the Natural Lords [*kurakas* or ethnic chiefs] that ruled over them, as when one says Spain, Italy, or France, which hold within themselves many provinces. They were accustomed to naming each province by its own proper name . . . and they did not possess a proper name that signified the entire realm.²¹

Things were different for the Quechua speakers at the high center of the Inca Realm, however, and particularly for those high nobles among them (like Inca Garcilaso’s kin) who were once the privileged caste of that realm. In Inca Garcilaso’s *lingua franca* of the Inca (Quechua), that realm or “union” was called “Tawantinsuyu, which means the four quarters of the world”²² conquered and “united by the Inca kings.” Nevertheless, within or under each of the imperial *suyu* or “quarters” the many “provinces” retained their local names in so many languages, and these were all that were known to the provincial natives of the provinces. By an accident of geography and history, then, “Peru” had “resonated famously” in Europe well before the Spanish conquistadors had encountered Inca elites and granaries (or, rather, the appellative names of “Inca” and “granary”) in the interior provinces of their civilized realm, named “Tawantinsuyu” in Quechua. But it was not just a question of mistaken identity. “Tawantinsuyu” was not, strictly speaking, a proper name for a land but instead a universal imperial gloss for the civilized or conquered world that, as Inca Garcilaso explained, resonated from the top and the center, for Cuzco, “the navel of the world,” was the place where “the four quarters of the world” had once converged. But as he wrote his history from Andalusian exile this was no longer true: Cuzco was no more “the navel of the world.” Lima, the new “City of Kings” was now the emerging center and lifeline of the “Viceroyalty” or “Kingdoms and Provinces” of “Peru.” Via Lima, the “New World” to which “Peru” belonged was now conjoined with the much vaster “Universe” of Christendom ruled first by “The King of kings” and

20. Crown grants, or *Capitulaciones*, named “New Castile” and “New Toledo,” of 200 leagues each but later extended by 60 leagues, were granted, respectively, to the *adelantados* Francisco Pizarro and Diego de Almagro.

21. Garcilaso, *Primera Parte*, Libro I, Capítulo IV.

22. *Ibid.*, Capítulos IV-V.

second by the Pope and “our Kings of Castile.” The age of the limited universe named Tawantinsuyu had come to a providential close that in turn opened out onto the truly universal age of Peru.

Between the old but (it was now revealed) false universality of Tawantinsuyu and the new and true one of Christendom, an antipodal or post-antipodal history would emerge. The historical subject named “Peru” was one of the first fruits of this antipodal or post-antipodal universalism. As in the ancient age of Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic “universal historians,” the universe had suddenly expanded.²³ But this time the expansion was truly global. And so *before* Inca Garcilaso could provide his foundational sketch of “the origin and principle of the name of Peru,” he first had to pronounce what might be called a post-antipodal, historicist manifesto. This post-antipodal foregrounding established the subject-position of Peru and of his hearing-and-writing authorial self (the voice of Peru) both as an “Indian Incan” (*Inca Yndio*) interpreting subject and, at the same time, what we may faithfully call an *Inca Español* or “Spanish Incan” writing subject, that is to say, a listening and speaking subject who legitimately stands, heads up, on either side of the world. And so Inca Garcilaso announced what was by then well known: the antipodes or upside-down people of Aristotle were, as Saint Augustine’s theology had anticipated, patently absurd, since humans everywhere are ruled by an enveloping celestial sphere toward which they raise their sights.

Thus the first part of Inca Garcilaso’s two-part history is the story not of “Tawantinsuyu” but of “the Incas, former Kings of Peru” (*los Incas Reyes del Peru que fueron*). How could it be otherwise? Since that moment of riverine misencounter with the mythical proper name of the barbarian “Beru,”²⁴ the earthly world had doubled in size, riches, and glory, and “Peru” was now the marvelous name of the better half of those riches and glory. Between that misty naming and the shining and cursed moment in which Inca Garcilaso wrote his history, the “Peruvian Empire” had become the fabled “Kingdoms and Provinces of Peru,” and for that very reason (her fame) was being bled of her mineral wealth. Still, as a vast and rich Viceroyalty ruled by “the greatest kings on earth,” Peru was immensely repaid, for she had found her true voice in the universal word of history. As a properly named land with “kingdoms and provinces,” Peru was now—in the historical imagination at least—on equal semantic footing with “Spain, Italy, or France.” Moreover, Peru’s destiny was personally overseen by none other than the breathtaking “Spanish Mars,” the celestial Virgin, Queen of Heaven and Mother of the King of kings (for she had appeared at Cuzco to ensure the triumph of the Faith), to whom Inca Garcilaso de la Vega dedicated the second part of his *Royal Commentaries*, also titled *Historia General del Peru*.

As Peruvians are fond of pointing out, even the eventual author of the unsurpassable *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1605) had responded to the marvelous call of her name, though he was turned down because he had lost

23. See Raoul Mortley, *The Idea of Universal History from Hellenistic Philosophy to Early Christian Historiography* (Lampeter, UK: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996).

24. It is not clear whether “proper names” or “surnames” existed as such in “Peru” prior to the arrival of the rite of Christian baptismal. I do not take “Beru” to be anything more than Inca Garcilaso’s retrospective baptismal name for the anonymous Yunga native.

an arm at the Battle of Lepanto. But here again history's loss was literature's gain. And yet, as Thomas Cummins notes, the creations of literature could also show up in history. Leaving their author behind, Sancho Panza and Don Quixote *did* make the crossing, arriving in Peru in 1607, where they were soon pressed into action as theatrical figures in what surely must have been splendid reenactments of the Spanish conquest of the Incas.²⁵ All of this was no chivalric fable. And so the name of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's surprised Indian, caught fishing by errant Spaniards at the mouth of a river at the end of the world, melted blissfully into the watery currents of the Renaissance historical and literary imagination.

III. THE FOUNDING TRACE IS NEVER A MISNOMER

That Inca Garcilaso's "Beru" has become a curious footnote or "trace" embedded in the name of Peru is both strange and revealing, for the presentation of this figure in the opening pages of *Los Comentarios Reales* provides much more than a rehearsal of the author's exegetical method.²⁶ Indeed, "Beru" is the key to unlock the mythopoetic treasure chest that lies sunken in the ocean of the text. The figure and anxious utterance of Beru indexes not only the linguistic limit of Spanish understanding and the barbaric nature of first encounter: in Inca Garcilaso's hands it became the inaugural performance of "Peruvian history." The mytho-historical conjoining of "Beru" and "Pelú" into "Peru" satisfied history's narrative requirement that its subject have a proper name with a future,²⁷ and it did so by virtue not only of a deft mestizo exegesis but by taking literary recourse to the mythopoetic tradition of christening upon discovery, here informed by that ancient custom by which rivers and kings could "write their names on the land." For, as Inca Garcilaso lets on, the mouths of great rivers and "Indians" had echoed in the Spanish Renaissance imagination "in accordance with . . . desire."

Despite the loud and self-righteous declamations that numb our discourse today (authoritative dictionaries bellow that "Indians" is a Columbian misnomer), it is quite clear that this desire was *not* a sign of the proverbial ignorance of navigators. The ignorance lies on shores closer to home, for "Indias" and "Indians" were never misnomers in this history. The desire that led Spanish-speaking Europeans to name "the ends of the world" was then universally imperial in a most modern way, such that its name was everywhere the same: "Indias." As Acosta explained in his brilliant but frequently misread *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias* (1590):

Among us the word "Indias" is general since, in our tongue, when we say "Indias" we refer to far away and rich lands that are very different from ours. Thus we Spaniards call

25. Thomas Cummins, "La fabula y el retrato: imagenes tempranas del inca," in Thomas Cummins *et al.*, *Los incas, reyes del Peru* (Lima: Banco del Credito, 2005), 1-41.

26. Margarita Zamora notes that Inca Garcilaso's exegesis of the name of Peru is more than a mere "linguistic curiosity" and serves instead as an opening demonstration of his method and mode of argumentation. See Zamora, *Language, Authority, and Indigenous History in the Comentarios Reales de los Incas* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 165.

27. Perhaps the most lucid discussion of this narrative requirement is found in Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

Peru and Mexico, China, Malaysia, and Brazil “Indias” even though said lands and dominions are very distant and diverse one from the other. One can also not deny that the name “Indias” was taken from Oriental India, because for the ancients that other India was celebrated as a very remote and rich land so far away that it seemed to be at the ends of the earth. And so, those who reside at the ends of the earth are called “Indians.”²⁸

The classical proper name of “India” had become the appellative colonial Renaissance name of “Indias.” The name of “the ends of the earth” was now plural, generic, repeating, worldwide, for Charles V had “pushed” the limits of Mediterranean empire to the ends of the earth. That “Peruvians” or “Mexicans” or “Chinese” were now “Indians” was surely not the mindless repetition of the invented misnomer of the wayward navigator en route to “India.” Quite the contrary: the dispersion of “Indians” marked the repeating threshold and horizon of a global modernity that has not yet reached its limit. The founding trace of this global colonial modernity is the synecdochal “Indian.” This repeating “Indian” is the founding phantasm of colonial and postcolonial history.

To become the proper subjects of proper history (that is, to become “Peruvians”), however, the recipients of this modern colonial dispersion (that is, phantasmagorical “Indians”) would require a founding speech act that in effect was a singular repetition of yet another ancient historiographical “custom,” one whose history would later be traced by the Peruvian polymath and historian Pedro de Peralta Barnuevo (1664–1743). Acosta had written that

during the discovery of the New World it had been the custom to name lands and ports after the occasion of their discovery, and this is how the naming of Peru is commonly understood to have occurred. The opinion here is that, taking the name of the river where they first landed, called Piru by the natives, the Spaniards gave title to this entire land. This is confirmed by the fact that the native Indians of Peru do not use, nor do they know, the name of their land.²⁹

But the wise Padre was, according to Inca Garcilaso, mistaken on one small linguistic point: the original utterance could not have been “Piru” since that was not the correct name for “river in general” in the language of the coast. But in his assuming that Peru got its name from a river that was the site of its discovery Acosta was following a historiographical convention of neo-Platonist origins, and Inca Garcilaso followed the same tradition. The name of Father Acosta’s “other India” had been derived from the Indus River, that is, from the Sanskrit appellative name “Sindhu,” which may be translated as “river in general.” This “river in general” had written her name on the rich land of “India” and also on the wide sea that swallowed her effluents. The same “custom” and verisimilar truth had also revealed itself in the ancient history of “Iberia,” for that peninsula had taken her name from the Iberus (Ebro) River named by the Greeks, and likely uttered by a native speaker of Basque.³⁰ Similarly, Inca Garcilaso’s exegesis had revealed that the name uttered by “Beru” in the place of the Spaniard’s first landing meant “river in general” in the Yunga tongue. The Inca’s verisimilar or neo-Platonist solution, which certainly agreed with what was known, was to put “Pelú” in the

28. José de Acosta, *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias* (Madrid: Dastin, 2003), 92–93.

29. *Ibid.*, 91.

30. Pedro de Peralta Barnuevo, *Historia de Espana Vindicada* (Lima, 1730), s/n.

mouth of a properly named native subject and to place that subject in “the river in general” at the founding historical moment of anxiety produced by “discovery.”

As the hybrid and conjunctural offspring of Beru’s anxious utterance of his own proper name and the name for “river” in the Yunga tongue, Inca Garcilaso’s “Peru” was both “imposed” and “natural.” In *De lingua Latina*, which was apparently known to Inca Garcilaso, Roman scholar Marcus Terentius Varro had “distinguished between names imposed on things by a person’s fiat or will, and names arising from nature.” Thus, Varro wrote, “there are only two kinds of origin of words, imposition and inflection; the first is like the fountain, the second like the river.”³¹ “Peru” was imposed by Spaniards, but only to the extent that it resonated with an authentic proper name inflected in an oracular, natural place in the original language and upon the “occasion of discovery.” Resonant with such classical notions, Inca Garcilaso’s account of the name became the canonical version.

In effect, Inca Garcilaso’s exegesis and subtle literary turning of the words of the primal scene of contact returns authorship of the name of Peru to a paper conjuncture between the fictive proper name of a misread and misspoken Indian barbarian who is the original eyewitness of the abysmal event, and the universal place of his modern colonial utterance: the oracular river-in-general at the edge of the world that was now the repeating horizon of universal history: “Indias.” This ends-of-the-earth conjuncture was now “properly heard” and written by the antipodal or post-antipodal “Inca” (Indian and European) historian. As the hearing “receptor” of Beru’s utterance and as writing “commentator” on imperial Spanish history, Inca Garcilaso moved between the time of Beru’s utterance and the time of his own discourse. In tying these two times together he made the name of Peru “verisimilar” in the idioms both of Renaissance “universal history” and of a proper “Peruvian Empire,” retrospectively reclaimed for a future “Peruvian history,” as the exiled mestizo historian’s true “Patria.” Consequently, the eclipse of the name “Tawantinsuyu” was not such a great loss for Inca Garcilaso. Indeed, his history accelerated its demise by transferring that loss to the new and universal subject of history named Peru.³²

The anointing of “Beru” as “Peru” in the river named “Pelu” ultimately led to a tertiary “intervention of interpretation” that only the Inca historian could have conferred, for it shifted the tense of history from the retrospective “our Incas” to the futural “we Peruvians.” Speaking in structural terms, “Beru” responds to a grammatical rule in that narrative of identity that requires baptisms and eye-witnesses: proper history. The “river in general” speaks a natural truth for she writes her irresistible name on the rich banks of the land. As the proper subject and object of history-writing, “the land” with a proper name (Peru) became the entity that it is, for she embraces “kingdoms and provinces” just as “France” and “Spain” do. But to know the river’s name Spaniards had first to hear that name uttered by a surprised native whose tongue had also named the river, because in neo-Platonist thought the original native name bore a special relation of “simili-

31. Cited in Sabine MacCormack, *On the Wings of Time: Rome, the Incas, Spain, and Peru* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 192-193.

32. Pace *ibid.*, 193.

tude” to the thing it named. Awed and stupefied by the sudden appearance of ships and bearded men, the ignoble “Beru” spoke his unreflective, natural, barbarian truth, but also what he imagined in a moment of anxiety to be what the Spaniards “desired” to hear. What the boatload of Spaniards heard was corrupted by their desiring ears, but in the grand scheme of things the audibility of “Peru” is inevitable given its rich resonances across the ocean in European ears. And so “Beru” is no longer any “Indian” of the modern Spanish imperial imagination. By virtue of the river of words in which the historian Inca Garcilaso baptized him, he is now reclaimable as the founding name-giver of all future “Peruvians.”

Roland Barthes has analyzed this kind of “performative opening” or inaugural “act of foundation” in historical discourse. Key to his reading is linguist Roman Jakobson’s work on the strategic functions of testimonial “shifters of listening” in historical discourse. These shifters serve to “designate . . . the historian’s *listening*, collecting testimony from *elsewhere*, and telling it in his own discourse.” This prefigured manner of “anthropological” listening in the historical text is everywhere visible in Herodotus’s *Histories*, for example. The anthropological listening brings “fables” into the historical text’s field of commentary, and the conjuncture of commentary and primary speech produces a mythopoetic, founding effect. As Barthes explains:

Historical discourse is familiar with two general types of inauguration. In the first place, there is what we might call the performative opening, for the words really perform a solemn act of foundation; the model for this is poetic, the “I sing” of the poets. . . . Bearing in mind these different elements, we are likely to conclude that the entry of the “act of uttering” into the historical utterance, through these organizing *shifters*, is directed less towards offering the historian a chance of expressing his “subjectivity,” as is commonly held, than to “complicating” the chronological time of history by bringing it up against another time, which is that of the discourse itself and could be termed, for short, the “paper-time.” To sum up, the presence in historical narration of explicit signs of uttering would represent an attempt to “dechronologize” the “thread” of history and to restore, even though it may merely be a matter of reminiscence or nostalgia, a form of time that is complex, parametric, and not in the least linear: a form of time whose spatial depths recall the mythic time of the ancient cosmogonies, which was also linked, in its essence, to the words of the poet and the soothsayer. Organizing shifters bear witness, in effect—though they do so through indirect ploys which have the appearance of rationality—to the predictive function of the historian. It is to the extent that he knows what has not yet been told that the historian, like the actor of myth, needs to double up the chronological unwinding of events with references to the time of his own speech.³³

It is well known that *Los Comentarios Reales* is full of “fables” that are subjected to “commentary,” but what is perhaps less appreciated is the founding mythopoetic gesture that the operation of commentary performs. Inca Garcilaso’s description of “the origin and principle of the name of Peru” is surely a faithful and reflexive “finding” of a Renaissance humanist historical method that privileged “the highest” and diminished “the lowest” by bringing both into view (in the text) under the double sign of Providence and the earthly Realm or Empire of universal monarchy. The eyewitness account (in this case, coded in mnemonic devices of knotted and colored cords called *kipus* and committed to paper by

33. Roland Barthes, “The Discourse of History,” *Comparative Criticism* 3 (1981), 7.

Blas Valera) was highly valued by European readers both as a poetic resource and also as firm evidential ground that could be marshaled as moral and political *exempla* in the narrative. As Margarita Zamora notes, “conflict between the accounts of those who traveled to America and the speculations of the revered authors of antiquity brought the authority of the eyewitness into a particularly privileged historiographical position.”³⁴ And as Roberto González Echevarría argues, this same authority was highly valued by the legal system and notarial codes of Spanish Empire; indeed, Inca Garcilaso de la Vega’s frequent recourse to the testimonies of eyewitnesses reflects the prescribed rhetorical procedures of the *relación* and his personal interests in writing his history.³⁵ The enduring historical and critical value of the *Royal Commentaries of the Incas* lies precisely in this reflexive operation, which is performed upon the eyewitness who in turn is located in the writer’s reachable past. In modified form this same rhetorical device lives on in literature, history, and anthropology today. But we would be remiss to think of the Inca’s gesture as ordinary “ethnographic” or “notarial” authority. Here the eyewitness authority is a retrospective ear, an audible tongue, and a prophetic pen that is at once royally Incan and nobly Spaniard. The operation of shifters mirrors its own social production, and is encapsulated here in a single authorizing phrase: “it will be better if this history is known through the Royal Incas’ own words rather than in those of foreign authors.”³⁶ These words are higher than those of the scribe.

Inca Garcilaso’s auto-ethnographic claim is an antipodal and courtly literary conceit, for his history and voice is at once proper and utterly foreign (after all, the text is composed in Spanish albeit in certain passages according to Quechua oral cadences) to the informing Inca’s royal words. His filial authority vis-à-vis Inca dynastic history is derived from his writing memory of a youthful hearing of his old Inca uncle’s royal speech. By inscribing his own discourse in the royally transmitted speech of familiar Incas from the past, Inca Garcilaso achieved the improbable dream of all courtesans (one that he failed to garner in life in Spain but that he abundantly enjoys posthumously), which is to become “eternal” by association with the aura of the prince and king (and, in this case, the Inca). As a result of this retrospective courtly gesture—a performance enacted in the text and in the author’s choice of his own proper name—the historian among the Incas will become *an Inca among the historians*.

For this Inca among historians the retrospective courtly performance was also a critical move, for “podremos dezir que la falta de buenos y fieles interpretes fue la principal causa de la muerte” (“we may say that the lack of good and faithful interpreters was the principal cause of the death”) of the last “Inca kings of Peru.”³⁷ That is, Inca Garcilaso’s royal history is a metatextual intervention of interpretation—an erudite commentary on primary discourse or speech by a privileged insider who transported himself in time and space to the primal scene—of those

34. Zamora, *Language*, 39.

35. Roberto González Echevarría, *Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

36. Garcilaso, *Primera Parte*, Libro 1, Capitulo XV.

37. Garcilaso, *Segunda Parte*, Libro 1, Capitulo XXXVI, folio 28.

errors of translation that were “the principle cause” of the death of the last and tragic heirs to the Inca dynasty, “Prince Huascar” and the “Tyrant Atahualpa.” For the most part, the crucial “errors” of the tongue were committed by the Inca historian’s common, barbarian Indians of the Yunga lowlands (“Beru” and, as we shall see, Captain Pizarro’s translator and consort, “Felipillo”). These barbarians of the tongue stood between the two empires and their languages, Cuzco Quechua and Castilian Spanish, respectively. Other barbarians of the ear also stood in the way: those wayward Spaniards who ignorantly assumed the transparency of language and who were filled with a “desire” to “name upon discovery.” Inca Garcilaso corrected those errors of history by revisiting the names, and so produced a verisimilar “translation of empires,” one in which the spoken word was rescued by the firmer, more noble written word. The noble word of history would make right in paper time what common acts of speech had made wrong in real time.

This colonial history lesson, in which the speech of barbarians plays a founding role, required the deployment of a high or noble knowledge of both languages of empire. The necessarily high founding of “Peruvian history” is enabled by the constitutive errors of barbarian orality and aurality, useful errors that may only be transacted in a retrospective “intervention of interpretation” that endows this history with a durable structure. This tertiary event of historiography may be thought of as that enabling displacement that “causes the production of an exchange” in the text among dead, living, and future souls. What arises from this death-in-translation is the subject and soul of a history named “Peru” and “Peruvian.” Like all such histories, Inca Garcilaso’s presupposes a “rapport” with “a lost object,” an interdiction in the “death that makes it possible.” Here that lost object is the speech that it would “resuscitate” but that in effect may only be brought back in a paper afterlife that is history’s lease on life. The “lost object” is the exegetical finding of a work of mourning, and as a result Inca Garcilaso’s “history is a labor of death and a labor against death.” As Michel de Certeau has argued, any such labor against death always leaves “the forever-remnant trace of a beginning that is as impossible to recover as [it is] to forget.”³⁸ Inca Garcilaso’s history leaves such a trace largely because “by etching his text in the discourse of commentary, he allowed the original [oral] text to surface and endure as [its] ultimate authority,”³⁹ since it was good notarial and historiographical practice to summon witnesses. As a consequence of this evidential surfacing, “Beru” will assume an inaugural place as the signature trace of “Peruvian history.” But Beru’s trace is surely a strangely telling authority, for it beckons from “the abyss of history” and its voice is that of the interstitial barbarian who necessarily moves between, and is swallowed by, a converging history of two empires that finds its historiographical expression in *Los Comentarios Reales*.

38. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, transl. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 47.

39. Zamora, *Language*, 61-62.

IV. FOUNDING BARBARIANS: BERU AND FELIPILLO

Another major character figures in Inca Garcilaso's account of "the conquest of Peru," one Felipillo. Felipillo is an ignorant and transgressive barbarian from an island off the north Peruvian coast (that is, from Beru's whereabouts) who accompanies the Spanish conquistadors as translator and guide. Apparently Pizarro picked up this isle-bound Indian in 1527 and carried him to Spain to become a good Christian, learn Spanish, and meet the Emperor. Returning as "Felipillo" or "Felipe Huallpa" in 1530, he was now Pizarro's translator in the epic campaign known to history as "the conquest of Peru." In *Los Comentarios Reales* Felipillo's botched translations are held partially responsible for the massacre at Cajamarca that culminated in the bloody and tearful extinction of the Inca dynasty, that is, in Basadre's "loud crash that shook the world." Like the much abused "La Malinche" or Malintzin of Mexican history—the infamous concubine and translator of Hernan Cortes in the "conquest of Mexico"—the name of "Felipillo" has lived on as a curse. Today a "Felipillo" is a traitor, a servant of imperial interests, a smooth-talking sneak, and in Peru the epithet is usually reserved for politicians deemed to be too close to the United States or Chile. We may be permitted to imagine, however, that Little Philip displayed certain qualities of mimicry and a sly civility,⁴⁰ and that he was christened in honor (in another poetic error of the tongue and the ear?) of the Infante and only son of Charles V—that is, the future King Philip II—born in the very same year that Pizarro picked up "Felipillo." In Inca Garcilaso's "anti-Felipillo" history, which was written and published under the reigns of Felipe II and Felipe III, it was by virtue of the "stupidity of the translator" (*torpeza del interprete*) that Atahualpa had misunderstood the Spanish (and Latin?) words of Fray Valverde's rendition of the Requirement, which demanded Christian obedience to the Emperor at the cost of war, and the Spaniards in turn misinterpreted his gestures, thus bringing down righteous Christian wrath upon his head.⁴¹ But it was not just a question of Felipillo's linguistic incompetence or the paucity of cognates among Yunga, Quechua, and Spanish. In Inca Garcilaso's account, Felipillo's uncouth desire for one of Atahualpa's royal wives led him to conspire with the Spaniards against the Inca. In short, a caste-trespassing, barbarian "desire" was also at work in Inca Garcilaso's configuration of "the conquest of Peru."

Inca Garcilaso's configuration of Felipillo raises a troubling question. Was not the transgressive native barbarian whose desiring tongue "got it wrong" among the "founders of Peru?" Indeed, is it not true that "Beru" and "Felipillo" are the "founding fathers" in Inca Garcilaso's narrative? "Beru" and "Felipillo" are the first "cholos" (upstart darkies) of Peruvian history, that is, the first transgressive "Indians" or "inappropriate others" whose speech is registered at the enabling interstices of empire in such a way that it may build a narrative bridge across the gaping abyss of communication that characterized the deeds both of "the dis-

40. See Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," and "Sly Civility," in *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 85-101.

41. See Patricia Seed, "'Failing to Marvel': Atahualpa's Encounter with the Word," *Latin American Research Review* 26:1 (1991), 7-32.

covery of Peru” and “the conquest of Peru,” now told as a history of impossible translations and desires. For how may empires connect if not for the interstitial space inhabited by the fictive barbarian guide who makes translation and “naming upon discovery” hermeneutically possible? How, in short, may colonial and postcolonial history be written if not for the stained page that the native barbarian offers to write on?

Although Inca Garcilaso’s founding inscription of “the barbarian” is a hermeneutical necessity, it is also tinged with critical irony, for barbarism is a condition that may be shared by the “shipwrecked Spaniard.” At the close of the eighth chapter of the first book of the First Part, Inca Garcilaso inserted the parable of one “Pedro Serrano” who was shipwrecked on a deserted Caribbean island. Perhaps Inca Garcilaso resorted to this parable to make the emotional state of Beru’s speech available to his readers. The parable is ostensibly inserted as filler (*por que este capitulo no sea tan corto*) but it appears in a chapter notably entitled “The Description of Peru.” Zamora finds the “hermeneutical key” to this story to lie in its harmonious finale, where Serrano and the other shipwrecked European embrace “their common faith in Christ.”⁴² I propose a somewhat different reading. In Inca Garcilaso’s telling, the shipwrecked Pedro Serrano swam ashore to an “unnamed” and unpopulated island without vegetation or water. Serrano the discoverer etched his surname in the island, which as a result came to be known as “Isla Serrana.” How did he achieve this etching of his name? Naked and armed only with a knife, Serrano survived for three years by eating turtles and gathering rainwater in their upturned shells. Meanwhile, his skin turned into “*pellejo de animal, y no cualquiera, sino el de un javali*” (the pelt of an animal, and not just any animal, but that of a wild boar) and his hair and beard grew down past his waist. The discoverer was now a barbarian. In the fourth year another shipwrecked Spaniard arrived on “his island.” Startled by the appearance of this man, Pedro Serrano took him to be the devil. Crying “Jesus, Jesus, save me from the Devil!” he ran away from the man. But hearing Serrano’s Christian words, the man shouted back: “Do not flee, my brother, for like you I too am a Christian!” After some days of Christian peace the two began to quarrel over the menial tasks that each should perform, namely, keeping the fire from going out or procuring food and water. Eventually, though, they came to embrace their common “misadventure” (*desventura*) and so survived four more years. By now both of the men sported “the fur of beasts” (*pellejo de animal*). So that navigators should not shun them as savages (*porque no tenian figura de hombres humanos*), the men cried out the Creed and “the name of Our Redeemer” to those ships that passed. Both were eventually picked up, but Pedro Serrano’s companion expired en route to Spain. Pedro arrived safely in Spain and from there continued on to Germany, “where the Emperor [Charles V] then was.” Pedro decided not to alter his beastly appearance, however, “carrying it as proof” to the Emperor that “he had been shipwrecked, and of what had happened to him.” His Imperial Majesty was duly impressed and rewarded the beastly Pedro with four thousand pesos in rents from Peru. After his imperial interview in Germany Pedro had his hair cut, but only

42. Zamora, *Language*, 165.

just above the waist, evidently having grown fond of it, in part it seems because “some lords and noble gentlemen took pleasure in his figure and aided him in his travels.” The long-haired Pedro set sail back to Peru to assume the management of his rents, but died in steamy Panama before he could enjoy them.

The tale of Serrano resonates back to the tale of Beru and “the origin and principle of the name of Peru.” Barbarism was the ignoble condition of the shipwrecked, the unlettered, the kingless, the deserted, but this universal condition could remedy itself by canting “the name of our Redeemer.” *Comentarios Reales* thus admits “barbarian speech” as that universal “abyss of history” that we fear but also that which, by virtue of the contrast between its lowly state and the noble “name of our Redeemer,” enables history to be told as a story of redemption. Pedro Serrano is the discoverer-become-barbarian who gives his name to the island and who is rescued by Christians who hear the name of their redeemer. Beru is the discovered barbarian who gives his name to a land under parallel circumstances, but who is rescued from oblivion by the “Inca” historian who hears his redeemer in Beru’s “human utterance” and restores it to its rightful place in “Peruvian history.” For the European-turned-barbarian named Pedro, salvation lies in the Christian word; for the native barbarian named Beru, salvation lies in the human word that, if only it were heard by the right ears, would distinguish his (human) nature from that of the animals.

It is not unreasonable to think that in his historical imagination “Beru” stood before Inca Garcilaso as “Pedro Serrano” had stood before Charles V. But what the Inca of historians gave to his barbarian “Beru” was not colonial rents in Peru but a lease on literary life as the founding abyss of colonial and postcolonial history. It has been my purpose in this article to recognize (*re-conocer*) this gift.

University of Florida

Copyright of History & Theory is the property of Blackwell Publishing Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.