The Indian, The Mestizo, and The Impostor: The Fictionality of Race in Inca Garcilaso de la Vega

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Abstract

Inca Garcilaso de la Vega is perhaps one of the most racially conscious authors of early modernity. In fact, he is the first American-born author to self-identify as a direct descendant of a colonized indigenous nation. As such, Inca Garcilaso understood well the epistemic implications of his biracial and bicultural status (his *mestizo* condition). Most literary critics have analyzed the incessant reiteration of his *mestizaje* throughout his texts as a way of countering the racist colonial labels imposed on Amerindians and their descendants. However, there is a complex and somewhat contradictory usage of racial terminology throughout his works. Sometimes Garcilaso claims to be a *mestizo*, sometimes an Indian, and at times he seems to only highlight his Spanish heritage, depending on the situation. In this sense, Inca Garcilaso's depiction of his authorial persona is not a straightforward decolonial counter-discourse. Instead, I argue that the Inca Garcilaso that appears in his texts is a fictional author whose deliberately inconsistent use of the different racial labels amounts to a modern decolonial strategy: a critique that ironizes the traditional meaning of racial labels, thus destabilizing their epistemic status. In this paper, I aim to flesh out Garcilaso's complex decolonial strategy, through a literary reading of his authorial persona.

Keywords: Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, Decolonial studies, Colonial studies, Indigenous studies

Introduction

Inca Garcilaso de la Vega is perhaps one of the most racially conscious authors of early modernity. In fact, he is the first American-born author and best-seller to self-identify as a direct descendant of a colonized indigenous nation. Inca Garcilaso was the son of an Inca princess (Chimpu Ocllo) and of a Spanish conquistador (Captain Sebastián Garcilaso de la Vega). Throughout his books, he wastes no opportunity to mention his both biracial and bicultural condition. He always reminds his readers that he spent his childhood and adolescence in Cuzco, where he learned the Inca ways, customs, and language, and later moved to Spain, where he fought in Phillip II's army, in the Rebellion of Alpujarras, and finally established himself in the cities of Córdoba and Montilla close to his paternal family. In light of these events, it is not surprising that most of his scholarship has been rightfully concerned with the topic of his *mestizaje* and biculturalism.[1] Most of Garcilaso's critics see his *mestizaje* as a way to unravel key elements of his intellectual production. Some say that El Inca represents a merger of two different worldviews which he transforms into a new polyphonic writing style (Mazzotti 1996), while others label him as a translator of the "*incario*"[2] into the Spanish conceptual scheme (López-Baralt 2011, Pupo-Walker 1984, Zamora, 1988, Jákfalvi-Leiva 2016, Fernández 2016, Castro-Klarén 2016), thus preserving a lost Andean world within the new Spanish epistemological order (López-Baralt 2011). In short, Garcilaso has been placed at the intersection of a Venn diagram. In other words, he has been studied as a merger, translator, and mediator between two cultures.

[1] As it would become clearer in the article, Mestizaje refers to a phenomenon of cultural and ethnic miscegenation where mestizos are individuals are regarded as the product of relationships outside the European conventions: progeny out of wedlock, of Spaniards with non-Spaniards, of Christians with non-Christians.

[2] The history and socio-political structure of the Incan Empire.

Nevertheless, a curious fact about the scholarly focus on Garcilaso's *mestizaje* is how little attention has been paid to his incessant, almost obsessive, reiteration of it. His insistence on his bicultural heritage throughout the texts can, at times, be an overwhelming experience. Not only does he make explicit his dual ancestry in all his prologues, proems and dedications, but he also finds a way to invoke his Andean and/or Spanish origins as tool to authenticate his historical explanations and as an authoritative place from which he develops sardonic philosophical arguments. For instance, in *Comentarios reales de los incas* (1609), Garcilaso relies heavily on having spent his childhood with his Indigenous mother's family in Cuzco to claim the necessary authority (linguistic, cultural etc.) to correct Spanish historians about their version of Inca history, while craftily concealing his "critique" of what Spanish historians got wrong or missed under the less threatening title of "comentarios". Analogously, in *Historia general del Perú* (1616), Inca Garcilaso puts a lot of emphasis on his father's Spanish noble lineage as he addresses the intricacies of the tumultuous civil wars being waged among conquistadors in the early days of the Peruvian viceroyalty. Furthermore, the repetition of his Andean and Spanish backgrounds in several key passages of his works aims to counter various conceptual misconceptions that Europeans had of Amerindians and their descendants. In essence, unraveling the intricacies of Garcilaso's self-fashioning regarding his *mestizaje* is crucial to understanding the construction of his authorial authority which he creates by employing symbols of exotic appeal.[3]

Considering these facts, my objective here is to delve into the meaning behind the repeated mention of his bicultural status, and thus perform a new reading of the autobiographical figure of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega as a product of his own literary creation, i.e., as a meticulously crafted literary character whose identity as an authorial figure depends on the reiteration (and sometimes suppression) of certain traits and aspects of his material life. Specifically, I will analyze how Inca Garcilaso constructs a complex and paradoxical literary persona, who sometimes describes himself as an Indian, sometimes as a *mestizo*, and at times overemphasizes his Iberian heritage, depending on the context. I argue that this literary persona enables Inca Garcilaso to question and destabilize the kind of imposture that racial labels usually bear. I also argue that this literary persona provides the necessary material to produce novel forms of fiction that work as decolonial tools in the struggle of Amerindians against European coloniality. In this sense, I suggest that Inca Garcilaso pioneers a form of conceiving of the modern author as an imaginary (not to be confused with unreal) character, who, in virtue of his fictional nature, can question the politics of identity in ways never available for racialized people like him. So, guiding this paper are the following questions: What constitutes a fictional author? To what extent is the Inca Garcilaso a fictional character? How does he use the racial labels imposed on him as well as his dual cultural heritage to create a literary version of himself? What sort of mestizaje did he develop? In what sense does the fictional construction of a *mestizo* character advance a critical understanding of the term?

To answer these questions, I will divide this paper into three parts. First, I will consider the idea of a fictional author in the sixteenth-century Hispanic context, its literary function, and its political implications. Second, I will show how Inca Garcilaso uses his own life experience and biography to create a literary persona throughout his texts. Third, I will address the ways in which the literary version of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega works as a conceptual tool for a decolonial critique of: i) colonial labels imposed on Amerindians, ii) sixteenth-century symbols of authorial (literary) authority, and iii) contesting the lines separating historiographical and literary discourses.

1. The author as a fictional character

Although my reading of the historical figure of the Inca Garcilaso as a fictional author is new, the construction of fictional authors during the sixteenth century is not. In fact, the fictionalization of the authorial figure was an emergent form of literary subjectivity concomitant with the modernization of European prose. One of the first Spanish (and European) fictional authors, whose rhetoric aimed at resembling real speech, was Lázaro de Tormes, the author-protagonist of *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554). This book is an account (a letter) written in the first-person, where Lázaro (the author-protagonist) recounts his life and misfortunes. Although Lázaro's life events are all fictional, to the sixteenth-century reader, Lázaro's adventures must have seemed as real as any other event happening to the ordinary person. The occurrences told in *Lazarillo* were not the traditional literary adventures which the sixteenth-century reader was accustomed to read. They were the occurrences of the average beggar in the streets of Toledo or Seville. This semblance to reality was certainly a new thing since it did not correspond to what was usually thought to be literary narrative (fantastic tales). Here is where the novelty of modern fiction resides: ordinary events could also be fiction.

[3] As it will become clearer later, these symbols of exotic appeal refer to the subversive use of the colonizer's epistemic values. Inca Garcilaso would reappropriate the Spanish ideas about Indians in order to flip the script, thus affirming his authority on Andean culture and destabilizing the Eurocentric definition of the author.

Moreover, Lázaro's manner of speech had dropped the archaisms pertaining to chivalric romances and poetry, to unapologetically use the vernacular dialect of everyday life. This means that there was an epistemological dissonance between the language of truth and the language of fiction. *Lazarillo*'s use of the sixteenth-century Spanish vernacular marks a shift in the epistemic character of the fictional text. The language in which it is written seems to speak truths about the "real world," just as chronicles, histories, letters or memoires, describe the real world. This literary trick is one of the most salient indicators of modern fiction. For this reason, critics contend that Lazarillo is perhaps the first modern novel (Rico 14). The life of Lázaro de Tormes is but a fiction inspired by one of the most common and ordinary characters of sixteenth-century Spanish society, the *pícaro* (rogue or lowborn city boy).

The discourse of the modern novel is, in essence, an objectivist pretense. As Francisco Rico (1987) puts it, the modern novel is but a *superchería* (trickery or sham), because it pretends to present whatever it narrates as truthful and factual, while, in reality, it is but the product of the human imagination. In texts like *Lazarillo*, the fictionality of the real becomes even more apparent as the author betrays the objectivist pretense, precisely because of the first-person narrative style. Here, reality is narrated through the perspective of just one person. Such a literary discourse epitomizes the paradox of historical objectivism: even the most objective of accounts is, at the end, grounded in human subjectivity. This is how the authorial figure appears as a central pillar of the novel's imagined reality. The formulaic expression of the "I" (*yo*) operates as a rhetorical device that situates the text away from the objective measurements of a purely historiographical exercise, and closer to literary narrative. In a similar fashion, Inca Garcilaso uses the author-narrator formula to produce a comparable effect. The constant reminder and acknowledgement of his authorial presence throughout his texts gives an air of familiarity that makes the reader a participant of another story, the author's story.

Before continuing this analysis, it is important to note that I am not suggesting that Inca Garcilaso's autobiographical figure is an imaginary character (for neither is Lázaro de Tormes), nor am I suggesting that Inca Garcilaso's texts are all a form of the modern novel. The purpose of this article is to flesh out the literary construction of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega as a fictional authorial figure, i.e., as a literary subject. This means that I will focus on the ways certain features of the flesh and bone Inca Garcilaso—especially racial and cultural ones—are deliberately altered to produce a specific effect in the author's reality. Namely, the creation of an author whose authority cannot be questioned, whose personal story allows him to carve out his own special place among sixteenth-century writers, and whose literary demeanor delivers a powerful critique of sixteenth-century intellectuality. As such, the elements constituting his literary persona are not mere echoes of Garcilaso's real-life; they are instead meticulously devised strategies that operate as markers of authority as well as spaces for plot composition, where the reader finds a strong critique of Spanish coloniality. Such decolonial critique consists in the playful use of the biases and preconceptions that Spaniards had of racialized individuals in the creation of Inca Garcilaos's literary persona.[4] Such fictional authorial figure is, in essence, an irony that aims at deconstructing the labels imposed on Amerindians and their descendants.

At the moment of creating his literary persona, Inca Garcilaso knew too well that he was an exotic figure. Garcilaso's cultural hybridity clearly distinguished him from the rest of European intellectuals before him. Such cultural and ethnic peculiarity enabled his texts to appeal to a broad spectrum of readers. Not only were regular European readers captured by the exotic novelty, but also creole patricians and the Indigenous elite found in his works a message that directly spoke to them (Lamana 42; Guibovich-Pérez 132-33). Considering the appeal of a racialized individual, Inca Garcilaso emphasizes his bicultural condition at the opening of all of his works. From the first proem (in his translation of León Hebreo's *Dialoghi*, 1502), where he mentions both his double noble lineage—his father was a hidalgo and his mother an Inca princess—as well as his exotic condition, to his historiographical version of Inca history (*Comentarios reales*, 1609), where he makes several mentions of his own family and upbringing; Inca Garcilaso appears to always make the most out of his "exotic" life-story. Inca Garcilaso did not intend to leave the reception of his life story to chance. He was decisively in control of the kind of literary character he wanted to present. He was determined to be the creator and active narrator of his own story.

The first stage of this process of literary creation is, of course, drawing a distinction between the real or material Garcilaso and the literary one, as this will enable us to understand how the literary character came to be. In the

[4] I owe the clarity of these ideas to long fruitful conversations with my mentor, Gonzalo Lamana (2019). In his most recent book, *How "Indians" Think*, Lamana highlights the performativity of Indigeneity as a subversive strategy to counter claims of indigenous cognitive inferiority. Based on the notion of the trickster, Lamana signals Inca Garcilaso's sense of doubleness or ironic double vision (where Garcilaso anticipates what Spaniards think about himself and, thus, confirms their ideas only to hide his criticism in them) as the primary tool for a surreptitious decolonial critique.

following section I will show that, although Garcilaso's "real" life episodes are present throughout his texts, they are strategically arranged (and sometimes transformed) to put forth a particular narrative. In short, I will explore how Garcilaso utilizes his own personal reality to transform it into literature.

2. From Gómez Suárez de Figueroa to Inca Garcilaso de la Vega

Behind Inca Garcilaso de la Vega there is another name, his baptismal name: Gómez Suárez de Figueroa. Born to an Inca Princess and a Spanish conquistador in 1539, Gómez Suárez spent his early years in Cuzco amid waves of civil strife and political unrest. Despite these turbulent times, the young *mestizo* lived a tranquil and somewhat privileged childhood, due to his parents' high social status. His mother, Ñusta Isabela Suárez Chimpu Ocllo, was first cousin to Huáscar Inca and Atahualpa Inca, the last two Inca rulers. Through her bloodline, he was also a member of his great grandfather 's (Inca Tupac Yupanqui, the eleventh Inca ruler) *panaqa*.[5] Hence, his maternal family enjoyed a residual sphere of influence within the remaining cultural elite of the Incas. His father, captain Sebastián Garcilaso de la Vega y Vargas, was the descendant of a long aristocratic line linked to the houses of Feria and Valdesvilla. These nobiliary credentials, as well as a small fortune, granted the young Gómez a better education than the rest of his Peruvian contemporaries. Gómez Suárez's early teaching was entrusted to Juan de Alcobaza, and later to Juan de Cuéllar, whose reputation and passion for pedagogy was reflected in his desire to see his pupils at the University of Salamanca, as Garcilaso would recall later in his *Comentarios* (*Comentarios*, Part I, Book II, Chapter XI).

However, his high-born ancestry was tinged by the fact that he was an illegitimate child. In the deeply Catholic Spanish society, Gómez Suárez was not entitled to the same privileges enjoyed by legitimate offspring. This condition had a profound impact on Suárez de Figueroa's life and intellectual formation. According to a number of testimonies recorded by biographers (Porras-Barrenechea 1955, Varner, 1968, Miró Quesada 1973, Durand 1988), Gómez had to face several setbacks, because of his bastardy. These incidents, which include being denied his father's inheritance, would eventually force him to come to terms with his own reality as a somewhat marginalized individual. When his father died in 1559, young Gómez Suárez was left unprotected in a rather hostile society against *mestizos*. He quickly understood that being both a bastard and a *mestizo* were not very different things. Since most *mestizos* were the product of relationships outside wedlock, the Catholic societal conventions in the Spanish Empire marginalized individuals like him. For individuals like Gómez Suárez, the law and societal conventions tended to work against their favor. Hence, both as an ethnic *mestizo* and illegitimate child (which at the end were similar things), Gómez Suárez was not entitled to inherit his father's fortune, and neither was he able to exercise public offices stipulated by the royal decrees of 1555 (Konetzke, 1946).

Soon after his father's death, Gómez Suárez traveled to Spain to finish his education, and meet his paternal side of the family. Though he was able to conclude his studies, meeting his paternal family did not prove to be a joyous occasion. According to biographers, young Gómez Suárez first arrived to his uncle's house in Córdoba, he received a rather cold welcome. It was no secret that this unenthusiastic family reception was caused by his illegitimate status and racial condition (Varner 1968). His paternal family, were part of the noble household of Vargas, which had a long-established observance of blood purity laws in the Iberian Peninsula. Such laws were primarily conceived to deter non-Christians, and by extension, non-Spaniards, from prominent positions in Spanish religious and governmental institutions. The *estatutos de limpieza de sangre* of the early fifteenth century originally targeted Jews and new converts to disqualified them for public office. Later, in 1492 the Catholic monarchs, Isabel I and Ferdinand II, issued a series of decrees that hardened the purity of blood rationale, by which both Jews and Muslims were forced to convert or be expelled from the peninsula. Even the new converts faced discrimination, as they required proof of at least four generations of Christian ancestry to aspire to a position in political or religious institutions.

This racist rationale was not new to Gómez Suárez. Although the observance of blood purity laws was perhaps stronger in Iberia, such juridical racism made its way into a series of royal decrees in the New World during the last years of Charles V reign (1549-1555). These New World decrees aimed at reducing the number of *mestizos* in political and religious institutions in the colonies. Ultimately, the world Gómez Suárez left in Spanish America was no different from the one he encountered in Spain. In the peninsula, the young *mestizo* could observe how highly intertwined Iberian and New World racial logic were and how Iberian racist foundations informed the constraints and restrictions imposed against *mestizos* back at home. Racial prejudice was then a persistent and manifest issue that

[5] A *panaqa* was an Incan filial group formed by the descendants of a monarch, only excluding the next monarch's family.

undoubtedly marked Gómez Suárez's life on both sides of the Atlantic.

Gómez Suárez's negative experiences with the Spanish *sistema de castas* (colonial racial caste system) reached a turning-point in 1562. In that year, Gómez Suárez arrived at the Royal Court in Madrid to seek recognition as his father's rightful heir. He asked for the restitution of his father's *encomienda*[6], as well as of his mother's patrimony (Varner, 1968). Both petitions were rejected. In *Historia general del Peru* (1616), Garcilaso comments on these events, arguing that they were the result of a vicious defamatory campaign against his father. Such campaign —he argued— was based on allegations concerning his father's participation in Gonzalo Pizarro's rebellion against the crown's government in Peru (1544-1548). He recounts that, after the jurors were already convinced of the proof he presented, the Court's prosecutor, Lincenciado Lope García de Castro, interrupted to dismiss his case, based on the admonishment that he should not have requested any favors from the king at all, given the fact that his father had been a traitor, a rebel in the battle of Huarina (Durand, 1976, 1988; Miró-Quesada, 1948).

Garcilaso denied such allegations, claiming that they were the product of misinformation. He argues that Spanish historians had rendered a corrupt account of his father's participation in the war, due to their lack of knowledge of the real intricacies of the battle. The truth —as told by Garcilaso in *Historia general del Perú*—was that his father simply lent his horse to a friend, who happened to be Gonzalo Pizarro himself, and who ultimately won the battle. Garcilaso thus says that even though his father used to be Pizarro's friend, he was not actively involved in the battle. At any rate, Garcilaso emphasizes it was after García de Castro's intervention, that the court dismissed his case. In light of these remarks, Garcilaso proceeds to tell the reader that he decided to rest his case, renounce any pretentions to his father's inheritance, and finally find solace in living a quiet and intellectually enlightened life:

> no me fue possible volver a la corte, sino acogerme a los rincones de la soledad y la pobreza, donde paso una vida quieta y pacífica, como hombre *desengañado* y despedido de este mundo y de sus mudanzas, sin pretender cosa de él, porque ya no hay para qué (*Historia general*, Book V, Chp. XXIII).

The relevance of this passage resides in the transformation that takes place. In the passage, former Gómez Suárez, who is now transformed into the author Inca Garcilaso, remembers the moment when he decided to abandon the preoccupations and aspirations of his previous life to become a different man. Inca Garcilaso evokes the occasion of his literary birthing when his signature would no longer be Gómez Suárez de Figueroa, but Garcilaso de la Vega, el Inca. In the text, Garcilaso uses the word "*desengañado*" as a way of highlighting this rite of passage. The famous concept of *desengaño barroco* (Baroque disillusionment or enlightenment) acquires here full significance. It marks the realization of a truth that, even though it might be difficult and inconvenient, brings about a special knowledge and awareness of one's relationship with the world. In this case, Gómez Suárez realizes that the world is but a stage, where one's performance is based on inherited prejudices and misconceptions. Moreover, he realizes that identity is something that exceeds the individual: it is conferred, imposed, and removable. Therefore, Garcilaso reads the words of Lope García de Castro, as another way in which the system has denied his legitimate identity. Back in Peru it was denied because of his bastardy, and now, in Spain, it was denied by stripping his father of any honorable identity to give. Therefore, when the impossibility of claiming his father's identity finally hit him, Garcilaso, then as Gómez Suárez, renounced any old pretension of claiming a legitimate identity through the system (i.e., through legal terms), to instead live a life of solitude and erudition as a new man.

According to critics and biographers (Miró Quesada 1973, Durand 1988), it was after the year of 1562 that the signature of Gómez Suárez disappeared to be replaced by the name of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega. However, if we are to take seriously Garcilaso's testimony in the passage cited above, the name choice seems a rather odd choice. Changing his name to that of his father (i.e., Sebastián Garcilaso de la Vega) seems to be a contradiction given the fact he was trying to move on from his past. i.e., move on from any legal pretensions regarding his father's patrimony. It thus is ironic that Garcilaso de la Vega is part or half of his chosen name. In this sense, the Madrid incident described above seems to be more of a poetic episode aimed to launch his literary career, rather than a reaction to the legal "*desengaño*" he experienced.

The reason to believe that this is the case is that, in reality, Gómez Suárez's petitions did not have a strong chance of succeeding at court in Madrid. Furthermore, it would be stranger to believe that he had hopes at all for his case. First, on the issue of the restitution of his mother's patrimony, she had none of her own. Anything she had, according to Varner (1968), Gómez Suárez already

[6] A grant by the crown, to a Spaniard, of a specified number of Indians for work and extraction of tribute.

possessed: i.e., a coca plantation in Havisca, which his father had conferred to him, to his cousin, and to his mother, while he was still alive. Had she had any other properties after marrying Juan del Pedroche, it was clear that Gómez Suárez could not inherit any of them. Second, he did not possess any rights over his father's *encomienda*, since the law unambiguously stated that *encomiendas* were only conferred to the legitimate offspring of an *encomendero*. From a juridical point of view, it becomes apparent that Gómez Suárez's trip to Madrid was a futile enterprise. This becomes clearer when Garcilaso took the decision to join the crown's army to combat in the Rebellion of the Alpujarras (1568-1571), as a way to make up for his father's poor reputation amongst the Spanish establishment. In light of these observations, why were the events in Madrid important at all in Garcilaso's texts?

As I have been hinting, to answer this question one should look at the Madrid affair at a symbolic level. This means separating Gómez Suárez's life from that of the new literary persona of Inca Garcilaso. For the former, one could only speculate the real importance of the issue. For the latter, the occurrences in Madrid were repackaged as a symbolic moment, a literary birth. As records show, after 1563, the Peruvian *mestizo* known as Gómez Suárez de Figueroa officially changed his name to Inca Garcilaso de la Vega. He chose to be called after his father, Captain Sebastián Garcilaso de la Vega. With this name, former Gómez Suárez de Figueroa started signing all of his works, thus rebranding himself as his father's legitimate heir. Although this new persona seems to have real correspondence with the real-life *mestizo*, one should observe that, ultimately, Inca Garcilaso does not conform completely to reality. This new character is not an exact copy of Gómez Suárez's, but is rather the magnification of some of his features. These features, carefully picked and meticulously curated, are developed into strong and vibrant literary qualities, similar to those of the literary characters of Lázaro in *Lazarillo*, *Don Quixote*, or *El Buscón*. All these characters represent a new wave of literary personages that, in modern times, resonate with the growing number of non-aristocratic readers. The difference is that Garcilaso is not a *pícaro*, a member of the bourgeois, or a mad hidalgo, but a *mestizo*. This is why Garcilaso's first act is choosing a name appropriate to his mixed heritage. Hence, he chooses his father's name, Garcilaso de la Vega, with the addition of the title of Inca.

Inca Garcilaso's name choice is clearly ironic for two reasons. First, choosing his father's name seems a blatant contradiction to his previous pledge to let go of any pretentions to reclaim his father's identity and patrimony. Second, adding the title of Inca to his name could be read as both an act of defiance against the rigid aristocratic order, and as a mockery. On the one hand, "Inca" is a defiant label because it designates both an inferior race "the Indians" as well as nobility within the Inca codes. This double entendre seems to make up for Garcilaso's impossibility of aspiring to Spanish nobility by reaffirming his mother's noble background.[7] On the other hand, "Inca" is also a mockery precisely because it is a marker of difference from the Spanish pure blood ideal mentioned before. In sum, Garcilaso's act of rebranding himself as a literary character marks the beginning of a number of rhetorical games aiming at disabusing the reader of a treacherous and deceitful reality. In Garcilaso's case, the reality he chooses to play with is the New World colonial reality.

One of the key moments in Garcilaso's literary journey happens in 1590 with *La traduzión del indio de los tres diálogos de amor de León Hebreo*. This was the first published work by an indigenous *mestizo* from the Americas. In one of its prefaces, the dedication to king Phillip II, the former Gómez Suárez de Figueroa formally introduced his fictional persona, a literary character created from his very own reality. The dedication functions as an instance to counter the juridical episode in Madrid. If we recall, the affair consisted of an audience where Gómez Suárez plead to his Majesty's court for the restitutions of his father's patrimony ("*pidiendo yo mercedes a su majestad*"). The dedication is, paradoxically, a parallel deposition, as if Garcilaso were recreating the court trial in Madrid. As such, he creates a parallel: in Madrid Gómez Suárez was trying to unsuccessfully prove his lineage before the court (i.e., his worthiness as a member of Spanish society); in *La traduzión*, Garcilaso is trying to exalt the value and merit of his translation, i.e., his worthiness as an intellectual.

The irony of dedicating his first work to the king, after he swore to abandon any pretense of proving again his family lineage is not only proof of the fictional character of the author, but it is also a warning to the reader, for they will encounter several other instances where nothing seems to be as declared. In this sense, this autobiographical character reshapes many of the features of Gómez Suárez's life in order to create a solid literary persona: Inca Garcilaso, the Amerindian intellectual of aristocratic parentage. In every single one of his works, Inca Garcilaso makes sure to present himself as such. There is a constant repetition of his ethnic and ancestral background, alongside a masterful display of historical, philosophical and philological knowledge. This combination of factors inaugurates the metatextual frame that interconnects all of his works. As such, each individual text

[7] It also shows how much care Inca Garcilaso puts into choosing his name as also uses the broader more readily recognizable form (to Spanish readers) "Inca" as opposed to his mother's actual Indigenous last name.

not only bears its own particular meaning or purpose (be it literary, historical, philosophical, or philological), but also forms part of a bigger puzzle. The reader of Inca Garcilaso's opera witnesses a fictional life narrative unfolding before their eyes.

In the proems to *La traduzión* –especially in the dedication to king Philip II–, Inca Garcilaso introduces himself as a natural high-born of the city of Cuzco and former captain of His Majesty's armies in the Alpujarras. These two features of Gómez Suárez's life emblazon the ethnic and social character of Garcilaso, the author. The confluence of his aristocratic and mix-breed *mestizo* background not only speaks of his exoticism, but also of a changing world. Sixteenth-century Spain, and Europe in general, witnessed the emergence of new subjects in the political and social arena: subjects with characteristics like those of Garcilaso. More and more people of different backgrounds began to have a public presence in politics, or in the arts. In *Lazarillo*, *pícaros* roamed the streets of Seville; in *Don Quixote*, shopkeepers and students begin to have more prominence and agency. Similarly, Indians and low-born conquistadors also appear in Spain's general imaginary through chronicles and histories. Thus, not only was the arrival to America a game changer for the emerging European states—especially for Spain—but it also produced substantial changes in all fronts, including a new literary tradition that reflected the growing number of these new modern subjectivities.

With the creation of his literary persona, Inca Garcilaso intends to shed light on the tensions, problems and dilemmas of the modern subject. This Spanish modern subjectivity was diverse. It consisted of a plethora of subjects, a large number of them being products of racial and religious marginalization. For New World subjectivities in particular, social identity was a concept marked by a caste system with deep racist undertones. But unlike today's conceptions of race and racism, sixteenth-century racial thought was deeply rooted in religious orthodoxy and social pedigree conventions, rather than in phenotype. Such conventions were the product of Spain's historical struggle to consolidate a national state around Catholic orthodoxy (Padgen *Conquest*, 164).

As such, in Hispanic Iberia, non-Christian groups were constantly ostracized, and deemed inferior to Christians. Moreover, the statutes of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) which required at least two generations of Christian ancestry to be considered a "real" Christian, added another layer of difficulty to social mobility. Hence, Jews, Moors, and new converts were doomed to either migrate or live a life of social and economic stagnation. After the *Reconquista* years (722 – 1492), there was rationalized prejudice against Jews and Moors distinctively characterized by a form or religious ideology (Padgen *Conquest*, 235). From the fifteenth century onwards, the legal and cultural emphasis of *limpieza de sangre* made Spaniards particularly conscious of racial difference in terms of social behaviors and parental lineage. In consequence, customs (forms of prayer, eating habits, and even personal hygiene) and genealogical trees were highly observed as a method of classifying individuals. The social groups resulting from these racial considerations were called *castas*. In the peninsula, this term was reserved for Moors, Jews or former Jews, but later it would also encompass the different forms of miscegenation in the Americas. So, in the New World, Spanish intellectuals pursued highly intricate and complex arguments to debate the right kind of Indian inferiority, and thus support the Spanish right for conquest, all while preserving the consistency of the Catholic dogma, as well as the divine right of the monarchy to govern. The formulaic essence of these racial considerations made its way across the Atlantic, thus resulting in similar standard prescriptions and prejudices against natives, as well as against *mestizos*. It should be noted, however, that theological and philosophical disquisitions were a rich ground for nuanced debate about the nature of native peoples. These are precisely the issues that Inca Garcilaso tackles with ironic genius in the presentation of his racialized literary persona.

3. Subverting racial labels of coloniality

3.1 Inca Garcilaso, the Indian

In the New World, the Indian question was undoubtedly a hot topic. By the late sixteenth century there was already general prejudice among Spaniards about the native's cognitive inferiority[8]. Such inferiority was rooted more in the Spanish need to justify the missionary enterprise than in their already biased perception. Let's remember that Spain's main ideological concern was the defense and expansion of its self-appointed role as guardian of Christendom and its universal mission to expand the realms of Christianity (Padgen *Conquest*, 238). Thus, the consequences overseas resulted in a theoretical obsession over the issue of the evangelization of the Amerindian other. A well-written missionary agenda for Christian conversion gave purpose to the conquest and provided an infallible justification to

[8] For a detailed explanation of the different arguments about the nature of Indians, see Anthony Padgen's *Dispossessing the Barbarian: the language of Spanish Thomism and the debate about the property of rights of the American Indians* (1990); and *The Peopling of the World: ethnos, race, and empire in the early modern world* (2009).

Spanish presence in the Americas, and thus to further promote a full colonization enterprise. In this sense, the Spanish evangelizing agenda was paramount for religious and political purposes (238-39). Moreover, since legal writing defined the relationship between the Spanish state and its subjects, including *criollos* (Spaniards born in the Americas) and Indians, the theorization of a consistent and sound theory about the Indian's spiritual (cognitive) nature (inferiority) was a fundamental issue for Imperial Spain[9]. As such, conversion was, at least in paper, the fundamental objective of Spanish enterprise in the Americas.

However, as it would be expected for any political issue of such an importance, there was heated debate regarding the best method for conversion. There were in particular two forms of thinking about the Spanish religious enterprise in the Americas known as the first and second waves of evangelization. These represented two opposing ways of conceiving the conversion process, of explaining the natives' cognitive nature, and how to proceed in the ministry of the faith. In spite of the differences between the first and second waves of evangelization, there was an underlying idea: if Indians were to be guided and converted to Christianity, they had to be ignorant. Their ignorance was explained as a form of blindness to truth, both worldly and spiritual. The first wave of evangelization was associated with Bartolomé de las Casas and represented a more benign approach to this issue. For its proponents, Indians were thought of as unguided children, who, even without signs of wickedness in themselves, were still incapable of fully grasping the true meaning of God's divine plan for men. The second wave of evangelization was associated with José de Acosta and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, and often recommended the use of institutionalized violence for conversion. For its proponents, the native's mental deficiency was regarded in conjunction with devilish and wicked practices, because Indians, as ignorant peoples, were easily deceived and prone to act under the influence of dark forces. This conception thus resorted to violence to set an example and effectively extirpate wickedness from the natives' souls.

Whatever the approach, the Indian's cognitive deficiency resulted in the natives acting wrongly, deviating from the true faith, and ultimately condemning their whole progeny to hell. In essence, Indians lacked the cognitive ability to discern what was real, what was true, and what was good (Lamana, 87). Furthermore, both evangelization ideas pinpointed another crucial element of the natives' intellectual deficiency: Indians were not only ignorant of these divine truths, but were also ignorant of their own ignorance. Therefore, the impossibility of recognizing their own cognitive deficiency put the natives in desperate need for external guidance and salvation. These arguments were used as justification for the Spanish political conquest, and to a large degree defined the nature of their presence in the New World as a whole. This is why Garcilaso's decision to portray himself as an Indian and intellectual directly questioned the Spanish belief in their own epistemological superiority. The indication that an Indian could also be a writer (a job mainly reserved for Spanish aristocrats and clerics) purports to a radical dichotomy aiming at dismantling the racist assumptions of Spanish evangelizers like Sepúlveda, Acosta and Las Casas. If there is an Indian who writes, there is an Indian who knows and is therefore capable of governing himself without any external assistance. Through this literary maneuver, Inca Garcilaso contradicts the Eurocentric narrative of Indian inferiority.

What is interesting about Garcilaso's criticism is the way he delivers it. The Indian question was certainly a delicate issue. A direct rebuttal to the idea of Spanish superiority ran the risk of suppression and censorship. In consequence, Garcilaso's critique needed to be performative, rather than a direct logical exposition. This is why he continuously reminds his readership of the things that an Indian *cannot do*, all while doing what he had just claimed an Indian could not do (Lamana, 86). One of the most telling examples of this performative exercise appears at the beginning of *Comentarios* (1609) when introducing the complex topic of post-Columbian cartography (i.e., the explanation of why there is a New World, which had not been accounted for before). Garcilaso warns that he will not engage in this topic, because, as an Indian, he cannot aspire to deal with such complex matters.

> Mas porque no es aqueste mi principal intento *ni las fuerzas de un indio pueden presumir tanto*, y también porque la experiencia, después que se descubrió lo que llaman Nuevo Mundo nos ha desengañado de la mayor parte de estas dudas, pasaremos brevemente por ellas, por ir a otra parte, a cuyos términos finales temo no puedo llegar. (*Comentarios*, Book I, Chapter I).

However, a few pages later he ends up extensively talking about it anyways. He engages in a detailed explanation about the origins of the New-World and Old-World division, and even goes as far as to contradict those who believe in such a division:

[9] The Indian question was a way of describing the Spanish need for categorization of Indians as humans capable of conversion (having souls), but in need of constant guidance and mentorship due to their childlike nature, if not correction for unruled behavior. Intellectuals thus quarreled over definitions and compatibility with the scriptures.

> Se podrá afirmar que no hay más que un mundo, y aunque llamamos Mundo Viejo y Mundo Nuevo, es por haberse descubierto aquél nuevamente para nosotros, y no porque sea dos, sino uno. Y a los que todavía imaginaren que hay muchos mundos, no hay para qué responderles, sino que estén en sus heréticas imaginaciones hasta que en el infierno se desengañen dellas (*Comentarios*, Book I, Chapter I).

So, when Garcilaso uses the word *indio*, he tries to make a point regarding the Indian's cognitive abilities. Since the word *indio* functions as the generic for all New World natives and operates as a marker of distinction, in this case separating cultured Europeans from the savage ignorant, Inca Garcilaso's appropriation of the term contradicts the meaning given by Europeans, rendering it obsolete as an expression of epistemic disparagement. Such performative usage of the word was already found in the title of *La traduzión del indio de los tres Diálogos de amor*, where Garcilaso purposely uses the word *indio* after the word for translation (and a translation represents a highly difficult intellectual task, for it supposes the mastering of not only both an unknown language and the language of the reader but both their cultural repertoires), thus flagrantly defying the supposedly cognitive inferiority of Indians. Finally, the title "*la traduzión del indio*", a translation done by an Indian, produces a surprising and exotic effect on the reader, who recognizes the novelty of the work. With this, Garcilaso highlights the significance of his translation not only as an important contribution to Spanish philosophy (León Hebreo was indeed a respected philosopher), but also because of the fact that it is an Indian who translates it and, therefore engages in complex philosophical thinking, once again contradicting any notion of Amerindian cognitive inferiority.

3.2. Inca Garcilaso, the mestizo

The second label Garcilaso uses to describe himself was "*mestizo*". While the label Indian was used to refer to ignorance, and mental inability, *mestizo* did not necessarily have a specific cognitive signification. *Mestizo* was a term that, according to Margarita Zamora (2016), spoke about a generalized social attitude against miscegenation (176). Mestizo was a term whose theoretical underpinnings are found in the long-established *limpieza de sangre* conventions, whose primary objective was to keep non-Spaniards from positions of power (Nirenberg 76). In this sense, it was a social term designed for discrimination. In practice, this meant that *mestizos* were destined to hold lesser roles and opportunities than Spaniards. For Garcilaso, this meant that it was going to be more difficult to make his way into the world of letters.

The prejudices against *mestizos* resembled those already held against Jews and new converts for decades, in that they were all thought to have of impure blood. After the long Jewish and Muslim purge of the early fifteenth century in the Peninsula, positions in the sciences and letters were reserved for Spaniards and old Christians, in opposition to Jews and new converts, whom were thought of as corrupt and potentially seditious (Nirenberg 76, 83). Similarly, in the American colonies, the Spanish crown feared that *mestizos* could develop a sense of patriotism towards their native land that might lead to rebellion. *Mestizos* were considered congenitally impure and dangerous. Based on this notion, most *mestizos* were actively discriminated against, and thus were kept from holding any real power in colonial administration (Zamora 180, Levillier vol. III, 235-36). As a result, only Spaniards were admitted to important positions, including the role of official historian in any New World Viceroyalty. In Peru, Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa, a Spaniard and former soldier during Charles V reign, was entrusted with the writing of the history of the Incas and their downfall. No native or Inca descendant was given such a task. In light of this, Garcilaso sought to counter the negative image that Spaniards had of Amerindians and their descendants, by linking his unfavorable *mestizaje* with his more favorable and dual aristocratic background: his Inca royal ancestry from his mother's side as well as his father's Iberian pedigree. As such, the image of an aristocrat-*mestizo* aimed to challenge that of an impure, and potentially seditious image imposed on him regarding *mestizos*.

As noted before, the *mestizo*s' negative image was rooted in the fact that most of them were the product of illicit marriages. According to the sixteenth century jurist Solórzano y Pereyra (1575-1655): "porque lo más ordinario es que [los mestizos] nacen de adulterio o de otros ilícitos y punibles ayuntamientos" (Levillier vol. 1, 445). *Mestizos* were thus poorly regarded overall, precisely because of an association between the negative act of adultery and being an offspring thought to be inherently prone to vices and corruption. Years before Solórzano, Juan de Matienzo (1520-1579) had already referred to *mestizos* as restless and incorrigible delinquents. As such, these prejudices against *mestizos* prompted the idea that they posed a very real threat to the colonial order (Zamora 184). Thus, colonial jurors and administrators like Lope García de Castro, president of the Audiencia de Lima, warned against possible *mestizo* insurrection and civil unrest in a letter to the king in 1567:

> ay tantos mestizos en estos rreynos y nacen cada ora que es menester que vuestra magestad mande ymbiar cédula que ningún mestizo ni mulato pueda traer arma alguna ni traer arcabuz en su poder so pena de muerte porque esta es una gente que andando el tiempo ha de

> ser muy peligrosa y muy perniciosa en esta tierra (Levillier, vol. III, 235).

Furthermore, during the early colonial period *mestizos* lost their rights to inherit *encomiendas,* to hold positions in the Church or political administration, and to enlist in the military (Zamora 184). This latter point is of special interest to Garcilaso because, in the sixteenth century, writing was still tightly associated to military values. Poets, chroniclers, and historians often participated in European wars or New World expeditions. Their military and intellectual pursuits were driven by the fact that these were activities that conferred name and authority in the highly aristocratic society of the Spanish Empire. Let's remember that, by that time, the majority of non-religious literature was written from, for, or about aristocrats. From the famous *cantares de gesta* (where dukes, counts, and princes were depicted as military champions) to the New World chronicles (where conquistadors tried to win fame and noble credentials through their deeds), there was a strong connection between nobility, military virtues, and writing. This is why Garcilaso purposely highlights his years of military service in the Peninsula (*La traduzión*, proem), as a way of defying the military restrictions for *mestizos* in the colonies, and of negating their supposedly treacherous nature. Moreover, his military career is another way of accentuating the image of the *mestizo* aristocrat for himself. By bringing these elements together, Garcilaso destabilizes the association between the figure of the *mestizo* and the traditional figure of the author.

This association gives rise to a new understanding of the author's authority that is not grounded on traditional sixteenth-century conventions of noble lineage or blood purity. The fact that Inca Garcilaso did not have nobiliary credentials (or was denied such credentials), in addition to the fact that he was a *mestizo* and a bastard, contravenes the Castilian notion of the aristocratic author. So, when Garcilaso presents himself as character with aristocratic lineage, despite the fact that he was often denied his Spanish nobility, he is not simply trying to contradict those who rejected his plea, but rather, he is highlighting the capricious nature regarding the social assumptions through which his nobility was denied. His insistence on claiming that he is both of noble descent and a *mestizo* erodes the epistemic foundations of the traditional definition of such terms (aristocrat and *mestizo*). This literary maneuver produces a powerful twofold effect.

On the one hand, Inca Garcilaso demonstrated that a *mestizo* could certainly partake in professions traditionally reserved for Spanish aristocrats, i.e., Garcilaso puts for the case that there is no real basis to claim what Indians or *mestizos* can or cannot do. Given that he was a *mestizo,* and thus one of the least expected people to be an author, Garcilaso's construction of his literary persona becomes a performative critique of the entire Spanish class and caste system. It exposed the flimsy and volatile notions upon which racial categories were constructed. For example, faced with the image of an aristocratic *mestizo,* the reader could only be left to wonder: could a person with such noble ancestry still be a *mestizo*? How could a mestizo form part of His Majesty's army in Spain but not in the colonies? Could a mestizo be trusted to tell the truth? As a term, *mestizo* was not ontologically defined, but rather subject to social prejudices coming from the already highly racialized Iberian society. Hence, the difficulties Inca Garcilaso experienced, when he called himself a *mestizo* and not an Indian, were not only a strategy to avoid racial prejudice, but also the result of the clash between economic and political forces. Every time El Inca talks about the impossibility of legally claiming his father's name, he is indeed alluding to the efforts of the traditional ruling class of excluding new modern subjects (and subjectivities) from positions of power that the elite Spanish enjoyed. This is why Inca Garcilaso chooses to transmit feelings of pride regarding his *mestizo* status: "*Mestizo… me llamo a boca llena y me honro con él*" (*Comentarios*, Book IX, Chap. XXXII).

On the other hand, Inca Garcilaso shows that an author is the author of their own life story. In other words, that author's authority does not depend only on external factors. The author creates their own epistemic authority. With this, Inca Garcilaso inaugurates, alongside other works and authors, a new form of writing: modern fiction, where everyday reality and history are also sources of literary fiction. This is why Inca Garcilaso, the author, can be both an Indian writer and a *mestizo* aristocratic, despite traditional opinions concerning the Indian's supposed inferiority and despite the negative decision of the Madrid court regarding his plea to claim his father's name and inheritance.

Conclusions

This paper has aimed to show how Inca Garcilaso constructs a literary version of himself as a fictional author who operates as an intertextual sign, as a metatextual character, and as a decolonial symbol. By introducing self-descriptions and narrating episodes of his life throughout different instances in his books, Inca Garcilaso, the author, connects all the elements of his opera and deconstructs traditional epistemological assumptions regarding literary authority. His life story contravenes deep-rooted Spanish beliefs about Indians, *mestizos,* and their descendants as ignorant and corrupt, and therefore incapable of writing. Furthermore, by embracing the paradoxical label (paradoxical for the Spaniards) of "Indian writer", Inca Garcilaso negated the idea that Indians lacked both the skill

and the authority to write (which thus meant that Indians were in fact capable of telling the truth, and, therefore, had intellectual authority). In short, his literary persona aimed to destabilize both the racist conceptions against Amerindians as well as traditional notions about authorship. By presenting himself as a an Indian and mestizo who writes and as an author whose primary concern is *not telling the truth* but *making his audience believe that he is telling the truth*, Inca Garcilaso calls attention to the fictionality of both race and intellectual authority: i) an Indian and a mestizo can write and tell the truth, ii) and an author does not necessarily have to tell the truth. Such literary artistry, inaugurates a form of writing where the quotidian and ordinary can be forms of fiction (e.g., the modern novel, utopian texts, metahistorical critiques, fictional autobiographies) that—in a colonial context—foster decolonial interventions against racist concepts and Eurocentric notions of epistemic authority.

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