

## ***Black Indians and Savage Christians: Unmaking the "Other" in the Performance of the Conquest***

Sarah J. Townsend

Few of the Spanish conquistadors, either spiritual or secular, could have hoped for a welcome like the one that greeted Alonso Ponce in each of the villages he passed through during his travels in the province of Michoacán from October 1586 to February of the following year. In his *Tratado curioso y docto de las grandezas de la Nueva España* (*Curious and Learned Treatise on the Marvels of New Spain*), Ponce's secretary Antonio Ciudad Real describes the elaborate festivities featuring dances, mock battles, and occasional plays that invariably culminated in offerings to the Franciscan prelate and requests for his blessing. Using nothing more than the force of his mere presence, Ponce is shown conquering the hearts of his indigenous subjects in a series of scenes that have all the sense of wonder and newness of Columbus's initial encounter with the people of the Caribbean: "there was not a single indian, big or small, in the village who did not come to see him, and they were all dumbfounded looking at him," Ciudad Real tells us of his employer's reception in one village. Strangely enough, however, when the Europeans look back, what they see are not their native subjects but black men and Chichimecas, the nomadic Indians to the north against whom the Spanish were waging an ongoing war of conquest. Why, one wonders, would these good Christians who were key allies of the Spanish – "very devout and sincere people," according to Ciudad Real – choose to dress up as black slaves and wild men? Furthermore, why would their Spanish visitors take as signs of devotion these performances in which their compliant Other appears, not as himself, but as Another Other?

Beginning with the early conquistadors' letters to the Spanish kings and continuing up to the present day, most attempts to describe the Conquest and its legacy have relied, either implicitly or explicitly, on a distinction that is often framed in terms of a European "Self" and its "Other" whose subjugation the Conquest enacts. In addition to physical violence and genocide, the partial destruction of native ways of life and the imposition of another have

resulted in a preoccupation with cultural mimesis evident even to this day in the discourse of intellectuals who struggle to define a distinctive Latin American identity. The Brazilian novelist and cultural theorist Silviano Santiago, for example, states that "[t]he archaeology of America leads us back to the violence of the conquest...to the violence that imposed on the Other his inexorable condition as a copy." Similarly, Enrique Dussel, an Argentine philosopher whose ideas are in many respects at odds with Santiago's poststructuralist bent, claims that the European ego did not "dis-cover" the New World but rather "covered over" its true alterity, leading Dussel to conclude that "[t]he Same violently reduces the Other to itself through the violent process of conquest."

While such analyses have been essential in revealing the logic that authorizes the act of conquest, the language they employ also points to the risk of mimetism that is inherent in the act of criticism itself; that is, it is possible that in engaging one's object of study on its own terms the critic may end up reinforcing the very dynamic that she or he is attempting to undermine. What, then, might be an alternative to this constricting binary and the constant mirroring that it sets up between the European Self and the Latin American Other?

One possibility, I suggest, is to rethink the meaning of the Conquest by drawing attention to the multiplicity of identities being constructed in performances such as those witnessed by Alonso Ponce and his secretary. In what follows, I use a strategic reading of the representations of blacks and Chichimecas described in Ciudad Real's *Tratado curioso y docto* to argue that despite the constant discursive move to subsume all subordinate or adversarial groups into a monolithic "Other," the relationship between the colonizer and specific colonized groups is often mediated through the performance of other "Others." In some cases, as in the missionary plays involving battles between Christians and Moors restaged by indigenous actors, these alternative Others are the ghosts of historic enemies that accompanied the conquerors across the Atlantic. Often, however, they reflect the daily realities of colonial society itself. In the case at hand, the indigenous groups of Michoacán and the Spanish defined themselves not only in relation to each other but also through their

interactions with black slaves and the Chichimecas, their common adversary. Keeping in sight not only the spiritual conquistadors and their indigenous suppliants but also the *negros* and *Chichimecas* invoked by the latter's performance not only disrupts the facile Self/Other opposition that condemns the New World to being an imperfect copy of the Old but also suggests the need to rethink the way in which power and resistance function through the act of representation.

It is precisely this ability to foreground the juxtaposition of different identities that makes both the study of embodied performances and the methodology of performance studies particularly useful in approaching these questions. In her book *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Diana Taylor points out that performances hold the potential of confronting spectators with bodies, gestures or facial expressions that can reveal new facets of a scripted narrative or even undermine or parody its original intention. Invoking the example of the mock battles between Christians and Moors, she states that whereas the original plays are clearly meant to polarize racial and cultural groups, the visual discrepancy between the roles and the indigenous actors who performed them forces us to realize that for the participants, the battle scenes may have served as an opportunity for "cultural masquerading" and "strategic positioning" in which they could "act out their own versions of the us/them." Taylor proposes the idea of the "scenario" as a useful paradigm for understanding the transmission of social behaviors and structures. A theatrical concept that foregrounds the issues of embodiment and physical location, "the scenario more fully allows us to keep both the social actor and the role in view simultaneously, and thus recognize areas of resistance and tension."

It takes a special effort not to lose sight of this duality in the scenes from the *Tratado curioso*, given that our view of them is limited to brief descriptions in a text whose primary concern is a much larger drama. Ciudad Real's depiction of the prelate's visit to the *pueblos* of Michoacán clearly conforms to what Taylor identifies as the "scenario of discovery" inaugurated by Columbus and endlessly replayed up to our present day. The drama

begins with Alonso Ponce himself, who causes such a stir among the spectators (most of them Purépecha Indians), that one might suppose these civilized Christians had never before seen a European. For the readers, however, he remains an invisible presence reflected only in the natives' awestruck faces and obsequious behavior; rarely are his actions described directly, an omission that creates the impression that he shares the space outside of the frame occupied by the readers. We, like Ciudad Real and Ponce, are encouraged to turn an ethnographic gaze upon the natives' unusual dances and skits, performances that flesh out the author's portrait of the region and serve as a diversion from his methodical descriptions of the local flora, fauna and foodstuffs.

Another element of excitement arises when it becomes evident that the scenario of discovery reenacted every time Ponce stops to take in the sights is simultaneously a scenario of conquest played out against a backdrop of unseen danger. Although the threat of attacks by Chichimecas is undoubtedly real, it is also a convenient plot element carefully manipulated to serve Ciudad Real's more general goal of legitimating the authority of his protagonist, who at the time was engaged in a bitter power struggle with other members of the Franciscan order. Even before embarking on the narrative of their adventures in Michoacán, Ciudad Real lists the monasteries already established in the province and states ominously that seven of them lie near the northern border, "among Chichimecas and warlike people, and so to get to them and live there one must undergo much danger and travail." The specter of these wild Indians follows Alonso Ponce and his scribe throughout their journey, leading Ciudad Real to comment every time they pass through a village along the border between Spanish territory and the lands of unknown savagery that "there is little safety on account of the Chichimecas, who often come to the river, and sometimes even cross it." But if the author and the indigenous inhabitants express fear of these wild men, Alonso Ponce is a would-be religious warrior in the campaign against the unsubdued Indians of the north. At various points the prelate desires to visit several other monasteries that lie beyond the safe zone in the "heart of the chichimeca territory," and it takes many desperate entreaties by other friars to

persuade him that he should desist from such a risky endeavor and send an envoy in his stead.

But while Ponce never manages to try his hand at converting the true "savages," there are plenty of "counterfeit Chichimecas" who at various times dance, attempt to scale a faux castle, and even pelt each other with lemons. Although he does not mention Alonso Ponce's thwarted attempts to enter the northern territory or the political motivations behind his conquistador act, it is not difficult to see why the historian Richard Trexler views the Chichimeca performances described in the *Tratado* as theatrical exercises in Spanish domination. Focusing solely on the scenes that involve mock warfare, he sees these spectacles as versions of the *moros y cristianos* plays, a tradition that he condemns as "a crafted ethnography of manners, clothes, and other customs intended by its clerical stage managers to recall past native humiliations, to create memories of present failures, both native and Iberian, and to project future images of these colonized peoples." His most convincing examples all revolve around the only scene in which a confrontation between "Chichimecas" and indigenous actors dressed as Spaniards takes place. As Ciudad Real portrays it, this drama fits nicely into the three-part "morphology" of military theatre in Mexico that Trexler outlines in his article: "greetings," "battle," and "submission." Ponce is first welcomed by armed "Spaniards," one of whom approaches and informs him (in Spanish) that "because there were Chichimecas in those parts, he was coming with his comrades to safeguard his way and protect him." These bodyguards yell "Santiago" (the Spanish battle cry against the infidels), ten to twelve Indians dressed as Chichimecas appear, and the two groups charge one another. The "Spaniards" capture one of the wild men and present him to Ponce as a trophy, and finally all of the other indigenous people file up to ask for the prelate's blessing before gathering to watch the "Chichimecas" climb a constructed castle. For Trexler, the scene's meaning is unambiguous: both a rehearsal of future native defeats and a reenactment by the natives already defeated, it is yet another of the military plays staged in New Spain that "involved large groups of people committing themselves to their own defeat."

While I agree with Trexler's general point about the dangers of celebrating forms of

"popular culture" without acknowledging the cultural violence that accompanied their creation, it also strikes me that his own assumptions about what the Chichimeca performances meant for the performers bear remarkable similarities to the "we think, they act" attitude of the European priests he condemns. Is Trexler simply seeing and critiquing what is truly there, or are his often misleading descriptions simply restaging the drama of indigenous defeat that the Spanish wished to see? Max Harris, the only other scholar who has commented at length on these scenes from the *Tratado*, suggests that while Trexler correctly identifies the "public transcript" of native submission, these performances also contained a "hidden transcript" of resistance. Describing the same scene mentioned in the above paragraph, Harris interprets the actors' cries of "Santiago" as mockery of the Spanish war cry and points out that the "Chichimeca captive" offered up to Ponce managed to escape his chains and run off. Furthermore, Harris says, the final defeat of the savages who scaled the castle was foiled by nightfall, and instead the "Chichimecas" joined the "Spaniards" on the ground, where "they all danced in their style to the sound of a *teponastle*," a native drum. Noting that in most of the scenes the "Chichimecas" who appeared shouting and brandishing weapons had no visible opponents, Harris concludes that "Christian Indians imitated Chichimecas because they could not openly enact their own resistance, and the absence of Spaniards implied Spanish defeat."

In many respects, this idea of the natives pulling one over on the Spanish is a more attractive interpretation than Trexler's story of unmitigated humiliation, since it allows for a certain degree of indigenous agency and also recognizes that the meaning of a performance can be constructed differently by participants and spectators. Looking more closely, however, one has to wonder if these basic plot differences do not mask a more fundamental similarity between the two analyses. Both, after all, are based on a common understanding of these performances as symbolic representations, either of defeat or resistance; for both, the drama is a duel between Spaniards and Indians in which the identification between the indigenous actors and the Chichimecas they represent is complete and unproblematic. In

Trexler's analysis, this is because the disguises worn by the indigenous actors are rendered invisible; equating the characters' defeat with the actors' humiliation, he claims that "[t]his theatre was not meant to conceal the group and class character of the players beneath the masks." For Harris, on the other hand, the disguises reveal a hidden core of resistance, a true self that exists prior to the performance. Rather than keeping both the actor and his role in focus and recognizing the dialectic between the two, both Harris and Trexler repeat the colonizers' gesture of collapsing these two distinct identities into the single category of the "Other."

The best proof of the conquest scenario's power, it seems, is its ability to limit even critics who recognize it as such to either illustrating its omnipresence or celebrating what they see as its reversal while leaving intact its underlying structure. This suggests that in order for criticism of the Conquest to avoid getting trapped in the story it tells, it is necessary to unthink the Self/Other dichotomy and to reexamine these same scenes with a different optic.

To begin, if we look beyond its own rhetoric, is it really true that the dynamic of conquest rests upon no finer distinctions than that of the European and his "insert-any-ethnicity-here" Other? The scenes in the *Tratado curioso* involving indigenous actors dressed as black men are particularly suggestive in this respect, if only because the color line makes it more difficult for both the conquistadors and modern-day observers to merge the mask with the face beneath. Twice the author mentions having seen *danzas de negros contrahechos* (dances of imitation blacks); in one case, he reports only that they "danced very elegantly to the sound of a tambourine and a flute" and led the prelate to the church, while in the other they seemed to have appeared alongside the "chichimecas" and a group of Indians playing the traditional game of *palo*. But it is another "Black indian" that makes one of the most unusual and enigmatic appearances on the ethnographic stage set by Ciudad Real. He tells us that Ponce was received in the village of San Hierónimo Purenchécuaro by musicians playing trumpets and *chirimías*, as well as three or four dances. In one of these "an indian came out dressed as Death, and with him another dressed as a black man saying thank you, to the friars

as well as the indians and even to Death himself." This "black man" played cards with Death and strummed the guitar, "saying witty things and speaking like a newly arrived black slave."

What might this inscrutable performance mean? Trexler does not mention the *negros* in his essay at all, and Harris's only comment on their "public transcript" is that it is obviously demeaning to blacks. Neither asks what function such masquerading might serve, both for the indigenous participants and their Spanish audience, or what it has to do with the real black slaves who are curiously invisible in the text.

Although Ciudad Real does not comment upon the relationship between the two, it is notable that the skit involving the beguiling black slave is described as having occurred at the same time as another scene that has an "old indian" playing St. Peter, who holds a ring of keys in one hand and a net full of fish in the other. While the schematic nature of Ciudad Real's descriptions means that any analysis must be conjectural, viewing the two scenes in conjunction with one another suggests that what is at stake when the slave sits down to deal with Death may be nothing less than the salvation of souls. This idea gains plausibility when we look at one of the commonly performed evangelical plays of the period, fittingly called *The Final Judgment*. In this play, the allegorical figure of Death introduces himself to the audience as "the officer of the law, the appointed one, the messenger empowered by heaven"; his mission is to remind people that they should clean up their act, "for the time and hour of judgment is at hand." Calling upon common Christian tropes, Death castigates the people of the earth, saying that they "have blackened themselves with great sins...Let them wash themselves. Let them bathe themselves in the divine light of goodness."

As the scene described by Ciudad Real indicates, this association between blackness and sin cannot be separated from the representation of New Spain's black slaves. The historian Herman L. Bennett argues that far from forming part of an undifferentiated "Other," the black population – which at many points during the 16<sup>th</sup> century outnumbered the Spanish – had a distinct place in the cultural imaginary of the early Spanish colonizers along with a unique legal status. Whereas the indigenous did not fall under the jurisdiction of

the Inquisition, a decision justified by their recent introduction to Christianity, blacks were perceived in a certain sense as "Old World" inhabitants and constituted nearly fifty percent of the cases brought before the inquisitorial tribunal. "By adjudicating over Africans and their descendants and not the indigenous population," Bennett states, "the tribunal magnified the ways in which the dichotomy between New and Old World informed the divergent experiences of the colonized." Spanish mastery of blacks, displayed in the public spectacles of the Inquisition as well as daily interactions, had a particular significance as "symbolic capital" that granted Old World residents authority in their quest to conquer the New. Referring to blacks as objects of "conspicuous consumption," Bennett claims that "(l)ike writing, walled cities, wheat, olives, and wine, Spaniards relied on the servile African population to signify their cultural identity as the civilized."

It is interesting to note, then, that in Ciudad Real's "curious and learned treatise," the black character who expresses gratitude to the audience is identified as a *bozal*, a newly arrived slave and therefore a liminal figure who marks one of the conceptual boundaries of colonial society. His exaggerated display of subservience may have appeared to the Spanish to be a tribute to their own authority and a recognition of their civilization's superiority. But these cultural and social distinctions are represented in the skit as an existential border between the sinners and the saved that is patrolled by Death, just as the black bodies tortured in the Inquisition were the terrain upon which were drawn the lines separating both Good from Evil and Civilization from Barbarity. Assuming in this case that Death won the game of cards (Ciudad Real does not say, but perhaps it is taken for granted), the performance would seem to indicate that the indigenous participants were aligning themselves with the Spanish on the good side of St. Peter's gate, against the black slaves who constituted one of the colonizers' own Old World Others.

The Spanish conquistadors' manipulation of distinctions among the various non-Spanish populations can also be seen in the appearances of "Chichimecas" that trace the political and cultural divide that lay just to the north of these villages. It does not suffice to

say, as does Trexler, that these performances are a metaphor for the indigenous actors' own historic defeat. While this is undoubtedly one aspect of the conquest scenario, the conquistadors' move to symbolically equate the actor with his role coexists with their need to view these performances as representations of difference. Ciudad Real has nothing but praise for the Indians he encounters, and unlike some of the clergy he does not seem to find any contradiction between their professions of faith and their use of traditional instruments such as the *chirimía* and the *teponastle* drum. These people seem to have been so successfully subdued and converted, in fact, that one wonders why the prelate and his secretary need be there at all. It is the make-believe "Chichimecas" that provide them with a pretext for their presence, standing in for the real savages that they never manage to see because crossing the real border into the lands of the Other might mean their own annihilation. These performances in which a slightly-civilized, recognizable but distinct Other plays the part of another, unknown Other create a frontier between the European Self and its inverted image, a place that marks a division but also a means of approach that is necessary for the Conquest to take place.

This underlines the importance of seeing the Conquest not as a *scene*, a freeze-frame view, but as an ongoing *scenario* that is played out over time. Considered in this way it becomes evident that despite the Self/Other dichotomy that is constructed to legitimate the conqueror's singular power, the presence of a third term is the essential factor that allows the scenario to reproduce itself. There is no doubt that the impulse behind the Conquest is for "the Same" to "violently reduce the Other to itself," as Dussel says. But it is equally clear from the account of Alonso Ponce's travels through Michoacán that the final success of such an endeavor must constantly be postponed. What purpose does the conquistador serve if the Other has already been tamed? In order to avoid working himself out of a job, the conqueror must constantly recreate new frontiers between his own Self and his object, relying on the mediation of intermediary figures such as the "Black Indians" and the "Savage Christians" of Michoacán as well as the bodies of real black slaves whose public torture taught the indigenous

the lessons of Christianity and the unmasked Purépecha Indians that were enlisted to fight the real barbarians. This leads me to suggest that rather than founding our critique (and perhaps our own authority?) on the epistemological ground of the reassembled "Other," modern-day critics would do better to reveal the ways in which the conquest scenario is predicated upon and constructs multiple differences that at other times it must erase in order to authorize its own reenactment.

Attempting to see the same events from the vantage point of the indigenous participants, of course, is another possible way of throwing a wrench in the works. This involves treading on even shakier ground, since the account of these performances includes only what the Spanish observer was able or willing to see. But even a quick glance at the history of the Purépecha actors' relationship to the groups they were impersonating is enough to indicate that whatever may have been happening, it was most likely more complex than either the Spanish story of indigenous submission or Harris's "hidden transcript."

It is known that the Purépechas that Ciudad Real found so curious and intriguing had a long history of interaction with the Chichimecas to the north that vacillated between violent confrontation and integration. The *Relación de Michoacán*, a text compiled by a Spanish friar between the years 1539 and 1541 and based on the accounts of Purépecha informants, traces the historical development of pre-Conquest Michoacán and reveals the ambivalent relationship between its inhabitants and the Chichimecas. The nomadic tribes, considered semi-barbaric by the more settled groups, periodically made forays into Purépecha communities and often settled among them. By the time the Spanish arrived, the Purépecha had absorbed many cultural traits of their neighbors to the north, and much of their political leadership was of Chichimeca descent. The *Relación de Michoacán* tells a tale of violent altercations, marriages, truces and acts of trickery between the two groups which, to a large extent, shaped the Purépecha identity.

This may explain the puzzling fact that in most of the scenes described by Ciudad Real, the "imitation Chichimecas" do not appear battling Spaniards; instead they are simply

dancing, shouting war cries and "laughing just as real Chichimecas do," or throwing lemons at each other and knocking one another over the head with clubs. As ridiculous and degrading to the actors as these scenes may appear, they take on another meaning when seen alongside illustrations from the *Relación de Michoacán* that portray Purépechas and Chichimecas (in many cases indistinguishable to an outsider's eye) playing out their own dramas by exchanging blows to the head. This makes me think that Trexler and Harris are only half right when they see in the Chichimeca "disguise" the true identity of the one who wears it, and altogether wrong to view the performances in purely metaphorical terms. Rather than merely symbolizing the indigenous actors' own defeat or their spirit of resistance, it seems more likely that these performances are actively creating both identifications and dis-identifications among the actors, the Chichimecas they enact, and the Spanish observers. The internecine battles among the "Chichimecas" are not a duel between two opposed powers but a struggle that even at its most basic level involves three terms: the Purépecha (more accurately Purépecha/Chichimeca/Spanish) actor; his role as the "Chichimeca" who is simultaneously his ancestor (the Self) and his enemy Other; and the Spanish conqueror who is a Purépecha ally but also an Other of both the native parties. Seen in this way, the drama set in motion by the Spanish overlaps with and becomes inseparable from a very different conquest scenario between two groups whose complex form of relating to one another confounds the attempt to reduce relationships to two monolithic and mutually exclusive terms.

Whereas the Chichimecas were hostile but familiar adversaries closely intertwined with the Purépechas' own identity, the black slaves and freemen with whom the indigenous came into contact were more clearly definable as a distinct group. Despite the fact that indigenous people in Michoacán sometimes worked alongside blacks in mines or on haciendas, where slaves and free blacks often served as overseers for the owner, numerous regulations throughout Mexico prohibited blacks from living among or marrying indigenous people. Furthermore, colonial records show numerous complaints of violence by blacks and mulattos

against Indians, including many cases involving runaway slaves that date from the era of Alonso Ponce's travels. Given this evidence of tension between the two groups, it is not unreasonable to think that the view of the *negros* in the *Tratado curioso* as sinful and demonic was shared to a certain extent by some of the indigenous participants.

But clearly there is something else going on here as well. Harris points out the importance of the color black in pre-Conquest religious life and suggests that these performances have their roots in earlier rituals that have "disguised" themselves in order to pass unnoticed by the Spanish clergy. In fact, the *Relación de Michoacán* indicates that the principal god of the Purépecha religion was black, and that one of their rulers and his lords frequently blackened themselves with soot in the god's honor. While pre-Christian beliefs are one of the factors that must be considered in interpreting these performances, I nevertheless object to Harris's reading of the black characters as a "disguise," a convenient cover for the continuation of native practices. Seeing these figures as a "hidden transcript" of a previously constituted indigenous subject denies the significance of the performers' relationship to real black slaves and once again elides the issue of the multiple "Others." It also assumes that performances can be read as symbolic statements rather than considering the possibility that these black Indians are not *saying* the indigenous Self in defiance of the Spanish but rather creating it through the very act of performance.

Although they are a far from perfect source for understanding the finer points of 16<sup>th</sup> century performances, recent accounts of the many dances and rituals involving "black men" that are performed in Purépecha villages throughout Michoacán today provide some clues as to what may have been happening before the unseeing eyes of Ciudad Real and Alonso Ponce. According to Janet Brody Esser, an art historian who observed these performances over several years, they usually take place on a town's patron saint day and during the winter ceremonial season from December 25 to January 6. Associated with both the spiritual forces of Christianity and the "principal beings" of native Purépecha beliefs, "black men" sometimes accompany the image of the baby Jesus through town and at other times appear as

*huacaleros*, long-distance traders from pre-Conquest times. Yet they usually wear wigs of black sheepskin and dance with what several of Esser's informants describe as "African" rhythms. Esser draws attention to the history of black slavery in colonial Mexico and suggests that "because his position was ambiguous – because he moved in both the Indian and the Spanish worlds while belonging to neither – the space the black came to occupy in the Tarascan world view was a sacred space, the place of myth."

While it is risky to place too much weight on contemporary evidence, one detail regarding the general context in which the "black men" perform may help to shed light on why the "black slave" described by Ciudad Real tries his luck in a game of cards with Death. Esser states that a person who performs as a "black man" invariably does so because he has taken a religious vow – a *manda* – after he or a close relative has recovered from a serious illness. Given that this mode of performance as fulfillment of an obligation or debt payment is common to many indigenous rituals that originated in the pre-Conquest period, it is not impossible that a similar understanding was informing Purépecha performances in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. If there is a connection, then, this suggests that the newly arrived black slave sometimes manages to outplay his opponent Death. As a liminal figure who negotiates the boundaries between life and death just as he occupies a third position between the performers and their Spanish observers, the black mask is essential for the participants to construct their own sense of Self. Like the "Chichimecas" who deal each other blows, the "Black indians" – indigenous performers who both are and are not the "black men" they play – create their identity by continually traveling across its frontier.

If the lens through which I have been viewing these performances is not distorted, it implies that the dialectic between the indigenous "actor" and his black man and Chichimeca "roles" poses a challenge to the understanding of performance that underpins not only Ciudad Real's scenario of conquest but also Trexler's critique of power and Harris's model of resistance. Keeping both the performer and the other marginalized figure he or she performs within our frame of vision requires us to reconceptualize cultural resistance in a way that does

not depend upon a simple inversion of the Self/Other dichotomy that authorizes the conquering power. It seems an act of perhaps unconscious oversight to ignore the fact that the people encountered by Alonso Ponce and Ciudad Real do not meet them face to face; the battle between "Self" and "Other" is one that their indigenous hosts would have been destined to lose, and it is unclear what winning it might mean. The way I interpret their actions, they take a different tactic, working through identities and differences to unmake the "Other" and create something new that bears no resemblance to the idea of the "copy."

Sarah J. Townsend is a doctoral student in the Spanish & Portuguese Department at New York University. She is co-editing the forthcoming *Stages of Conflict: A Reader in Latin American Theatre & Performance* with Diana Taylor.