Conquest and Colonial Resistance on the Early Modern Stage:

From Shakespeare to Lope, Calderón, and Moreto

Of all Early Modern plays, *The Tempest* has received the most attention from writers and intellectuals in Latin America and the Caribbean. Shakespeare’s three main characters—the aerie spirit Ariel, the grotesque monster Caliban, and the right Duke of Milan Prospero—have long been appropriated as symbols of the political and social relations between the United States and the rest of the Western Hemisphere. Originally, writers such as Rubén Darío and José Enrique Rodó conclude that the noble Ariel is the symbol of Spanish America because he represents the most elevated part of the human spirit, while the lowly Caliban typifies North American vulgarity and material desires. Beginning in the 1960’s however, many third-world writers—and later many more first-world literary critics—interpret *The Tempest* as the struggle between the colonizer Prospero and the indigenous character Caliban. Nevertheless, Golden Age theater presents a more imposing figure to personify American resistance to the spread of European imperial power. Spanish dramatists view the discovery and the colonization of the Indies as the religious conquest of a corrupt and heretical region that is dominated by the twin presence of the Devil and idolatry. As this study demonstrates, indigenous cultures are thought to live under the hegemony of these two demonic forces, which means that the most important figure of native resistance on the seventeenth-century stage is not the inept and grotesque Caliban, but rather his putative father the Devil.