

Destiny as the Harbinger and Destroyer of the Golden Age in *La Araucana*

Frecuentemente conceptualizadas como la génesis de una nueva edad áurea, las profecías medievales del último emperador mundial y el segundo Carlomagno sirvieron de estímulo ideológico para la conquista española de La Araucanía. Examinando La Araucana (1569, 1578, 1589) de Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga, afirmo que las dudas del poeta acerca de la empresa imperial revelan que, a pesar de su insistencia en la venida inminente del apocalipsis y una nueva edad áurea, el destino de esta empresa da pie a una edad de hierro. A comienzos del poema, Ercilla se esmera en documentar la Guerra de Arauco al componer una crónica rimada en tres partes, la segunda y la tercera partes de la cual son recipientes en que el poeta vierte sus lamentaciones sobre la realidad cruenta en La Araucanía. Al determinar que ha penetrado en un paraíso terrestre durante una misión al archipiélago de Chiloé - donde se maravilla ante la vida pacífica de los nativos -, Ercilla se percata de que el destino imperial no abre paso a una nueva edad áurea, sino que antes ocasiona una edad de hierro. Esta epifanía lacerante desenmascara la base artificial de este destino y el imperio que se lo ha apropiado.

In *La Araucana*, Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga's attempt to link the prophecies of Felipe II's feats in Europe to the Arauco War backfires. Published in three parts over the course of twenty years (i.e., 1569, 1578, and 1589), the poet's bestselling epic reads as a versified history of the Spanish conquest of Chile that mutates into a somber reflection on the project of empire. Instead of imbuing his poem with the teleological clarity of Europe's *translatio imperii*, by using prophecy to justify conquest, Ercilla not only exposes the impossibility of writing a destiny onto a reality that resists at every turn; he also acknowledges that by calling on the instruments of empire to usher in an apocalyptic golden age, this destiny is essentially at odds with itself, a potent poison passed off as an elixir of peace. Put another way, he implies that in attempting to effectuate the prophesied destiny, Habsburg Spain's presence in the Araucanía brings about the very iron age from which it seeks to escape.

The process whereby this contradiction becomes apparent in the poem is twofold. First, horrified and baffled by the carnage he witnesses,

Ercilla wanders from the battlefield into pastoral reveries where prophetic visions furnish his poem with the teleological clarity it lacks. Recounted at the tip of Ercilla's pen, the mantic visions of Felipe II fulfilling his role as Pseudo-Methodius's "king of the Greeks, that is, of the Romans" - the harbinger of a millennial paradise later called the "Last World Emperor" or "Second Charlemagne" - shore up his destiny to rule over the Americas (Pseudo-Methodius 127).¹ Secondly, Ercilla succeeds in upholding this precarious illusion until the war ends, and with it, material to prove its worth. Intercalated into the 1596 edition, an encounter with a peaceable and generous group of *chilotes* on the Chiloé Archipelago leads Ercilla to the chilling epiphany that there, an Amerindian golden age is flourishing, and that by stumbling upon it he and his band of soldiers have sown its destruction in the name of an increasingly nebulous future. When it dawns on him that the imperial destiny not only fails to usher in a new golden age, but actually brings on one of iron, he reveals the artificial underpinnings of that destiny and the empire it serves.

Though he did not inherit the imperial tiara from his father, Felipe II inherited the Castile-centered branch of Carlos V's empire precisely when belief in its messianic mission was peaking (Kagan 91). To postulate that Carlos V or, later, Felipe II is the herald of the apocalypse, then, is to hold him responsible for routing the enemies of Christendom and evangelizing the globe, thereby enacting the return of Christ. Within the Judeo-Christian worldview, the advent of the messiah leads invariably to a new golden age. It is akin to the rock that demolishes the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2 or the descent of New Jerusalem from the heavens at the end of Revelation, after the earth has been purged of unrepentant sinners. Under the influence of Renaissance humanism, however, Ercilla - like many of his fellow poets - blended his Catholic sensibilities with classical Greco-Roman erudition. The first references to the golden age date to Homer's *Odyssey* and Hesiod's *Works and Days*, both of which project it into the distant past (Giamatti 16-17). Rhapsodizing about the golden age became so hackneyed a literary topos that it lost its popularity not long after Virgil penned his *Eclogues* and emerged with a renewed focus on the classics during the Renaissance.

Curiously, like the Christian poets who would imitate him for centuries, Virgil prophesies the return of the golden age in his "Fourth Eclogue." Whether cast into the mists of the future or the past, the golden age is, in Harry Levin's words, "all that the contemporary age is not" (11). As a moralizing foil to the present day, which is always considered an iron age, the hope for another golden age is necessary and enchanting, but also "must turn out to be an illusion; for the very premise of the myth is its

sense of belatedness, the romantic sentiment - which even Hesiod professed - of having been born too late into a world too old" (Levin 43). Hence the persistent appeal of Virgil's "Fourth Eclogue," a poetic jewel of an empire Habsburg Spain aimed to surpass. But for the apologists of Felipe II's empire, the means whereby this new age would be wrought were decidedly Judeo-Christian. If Ercilla and his contemporaries inherited the classical nostalgia for the golden age, it was the convergence of German prophecies of the Last World Emperor and French prophecies of a Second Charlemagne in the House of Habsburg that offered an eschatological blueprint for its coming - not as a restored paradise under the aegis of Saturn, but as a thoroughly Christianized "golden age," the millennial kingdom of God (Reeves, *Influence* 359; Emerson 68-69).

Indeed, although the golden age became an increasingly common topos in the late Middle Ages, its application to political prophecy through the seventeenth century should not be interpreted as a yearning to recover a bygone era. Both in Judaism and Christianity, the promise of a coming messiah rules out all temporalities but a rectilinear march towards the end of time. However frequent invocations of the golden age were, then, by the early modern period it had become another classical literary vessel into which writers poured indisputably Christian beliefs. As Marjorie Reeves concedes, the push towards a *renovatio mundi* pioneered under Joachim of Fiore, a twelfth-century Cistercian monk, became so entrenched in late medieval and early modern prophetic discourse that it "had, of course, a note of a return to a golden past" (*Influence* 305). Still, given the widespread usage of ancient Greco-Roman motifs during the same period - along with Habsburg Spain's insistence that it alone was the legitimate heir to Rome - , it is hardly surprising that such motifs would also insinuate themselves into prophetic discourse.

Renovatio invokes the classical golden age as a way of placing an empire that only remotely resembled that of ancient Rome on the same pedestal. Yet like the variance between Judeo-Christian prophecy and its polytheistic cousins, the stark contrasts between Habsburg Spain's global empire and the ancient Roman *imperium* indicate that, even if similar, their concept of a "golden age" was far from identical. If the classical *renovatio* clamored for the restoration of a lost paradise, the rebirth of a time deemed to be forever lost, its early modern correlate "clearly expressed the expectation of a process which was not a renewal so much as the final consummation within history" (Reeves, *Influence* 305). At the end of time, by this account, lies an apocalyptic golden age towards which Carlos V and later, Felipe II, are to shepherd the whole of humankind after vanquishing its redoubtable foes. It was this golden age and the Spanish Habsburg

monarchy's charge towards it that Ercilla bore in mind, which, in Andrés Prieto's view, is essential to understanding the prophecies in *La Araucana* and why Felipe II becomes a sword-brandishing hero who augurs the end of days in fire and blood (85).

In the second part of the epic, for instance, Bellona concludes her prophecy of the Battle of Saint-Quentin that the atrocities committed are indices of "lo que el Padre Eterno ordena y quiere" against France, heretics, and the Muslim world:

[M]as vuestro Rey, con presta providencia,
previniendo al futuro daño luego,
atajará en España esta dolencia
con rigor necesario, a puro fuego.
Curada la perversa pestilencia,
las armas enemigas del sosiego
con furia moverá contra el Oriente
enviando a Peñon su armada y gente. (2.18.30, 35)²

The destiny Bellona lays out recalls Pseudo-Methodius's schema, starting with a purge within Christendom and then mobilizing an assault against the Islamic "Oriente" epitomized by the Ottoman Empire. Depicting Felipe II in these prophecies is therefore not merely a legitimating gesture that, according to Ramona Lagos, "resguarda, en conciencia del narrador, la justicia de la guerra que hacen los españoles en Europa" (178). His presence also carries the apocalyptic sway needed to rationalize waging war for the sake of peace. In Tanner's words, the Habsburgs, "[t]hrough the destruction of the Moslem Empire and the Christianization of the Americas ... claimed to restore the universal harmony that was prophesied in Vergil's Fourth Eclogue" (7).

For Ercilla, burning heretics at the stake in Europe and quelling the Ottomans lie well within the bounds of the Spanish Habsburg destiny to herald a new age under Christ's auspices. As numerous critics have contended, the poet uses prophecy to depict the Arauco War in the same fashion, although it is questionable whether he succeeds in bridging the Mediterranean and American contexts.³ Other than Prieto, however, there is scant discussion of what the apocalyptic (and thus, teleological) implications of the imperial prophecies in *La Araucana* are. While it is certain that geographical proximity made the Ottoman Empire and heresy on both sides of the Pyrenees more urgent challenges, the American enterprise was no less crucial to Felipe II's overall mission. Indeed, as Reeves points out, Christopher Columbus's *Libro de las profecías* (c. 1500-2)

frames “the three climatic events of the Last Age as the discovery of the Indies, the conversion of the Gentiles and the recovery of the Holy City,” while Gerónimo de Mendieta and his fellow Franciscans held that “Cortés had been inspired by the Holy Spirit when, upon their entry, he took off his cape for them to walk over, signifying - in concord with Christ’s entry into Jerusalem - the transformation of Mexico City into the New Jerusalem” (“Apocalyptic” 64).⁴ For imperial ideologues, then, the Americas - including the Araucanía region where Ercilla scribbles his rhymed chronicle of war - may lie far from the imperial metropole, but they are just as crucial to bringing about the New Jerusalem as an Ottoman defeat.

Ercilla strives in the first part of *La Araucana* to highlight the providential nature of the Arauco War. Mobilized in large fleets armed with the most advanced munitions available, thousands of soldiers - including the poet himself - disembarked on the shores of the Araucanía region to pacify rebellions launched by the Mapuche people against the Spanish conquest. In the first canto of *La Araucana*, the poet maintains that domination of the Araucanía is justified, since “el hado y clima de esta tierra, / si su estrella y pronósticos se miran, / es contienda, furor, discordia, guerra / y a solo esto los ánimos aspiran” (Ercilla 1.1.45). Still, Diego de Almagro’s sally into the region to “extender y ensanchar la fe de Cristo” only came to fruition when Pedro de Valdivia “la altiva gente al grave yugo trujo / y en opresión la libertad redujo” (Ercilla 1.1.55). At this early juncture, based on histories of the early years of Spanish incursions into the Araucanía region, the tension between evangelization and violent subjugation intrinsic to the imperial destiny remains latent. This is in part because the legal grounds for Felipe II’s wars in Europe require meticulous explanation and because Ercilla himself did not arrive in Chile until the spring of 1557 (coinciding roughly with Canto XII) - over a decade after the Battle of Reynogüelén in 1536, the first skirmish between Spanish explorers and the Mapuche (Pierce 64).⁵ Although the poet does not harbor even a “menor duda acerca del carácter providencial de la empresa americana,” his doubts grow about the viability of that providential “empresa” with each atrocity and bloody skirmish (Lerner 38).

Unsurprisingly, Ercilla’s serious reservations about the place of imperial destiny in the Arauco War appear only rarely until after Canto XII, and then balloon in the second and third parts of the poem. Until the third part, these reservations come as complaints about chronicling a war so complex that it defies comprehension. Documenting an entire war of conquest leaves little wonder as to why he insists that “aunque por campo próspero la pluma / corra con fértil vena y ligereza, / tanto el sujeto y la materia arguye / que todo lo deshace y disminuye” (Ercilla 2.18.1). Towns,

forts, and territories go back and forth between Mapuche and Spanish control for most of the epic. Ercilla churns out long lists of warriors who smash through the helmets of Spanish soldiers with clubs, and he also recounts with equal detail how the Spanish plunge their swords into their opponents. The war rages at such a rapid pace that Ercilla finds himself struggling to keep up, and at several points he digresses to vent his frustration. Flustered, he seems unable to write so that “todo acierte, / que mi cansada mano ya no puede / por tanta confusión llevar la pluma / y así reduce mucho a breve suma” (Ercilla 1.9.77). Yet Ercilla recognizes the value of his vocation and more than once endures the pain of its limitations. “Por mirar embebecida,” he senses that everything is changing much too quickly for his “torpe pluma” to crystallize it into a coherent whole. He writes in desperation so that “tanto valor no pereciese, / ni el tiempo injustamente lo consuma” (Ercilla 1.12.72).

Ercilla’s metadiscursive observations about writing reflect a venerable tradition of classical and early modern narrative poetry. To bemoan the challenge of writing and other moral quandaries is a leitmotif built of “short but recurring thoughts on the action of the poem as it develops [that] add up for the most part to conventional and in no way original statements of moral belief” (Pierce 68). What is significant about this metadiscourse is not its presence in *La Araucana* so much as how the events to which Ercilla bears witness belie the providential destiny he tries to impose on them. Ironically, it is only through distance from the battlefield that he manages to restore some of the teleological clarity of the early *cantos*. Well into the second part of *La Araucana*, Ercilla finds himself toiling at candlelight into the early hours of the morning, “imaginativo y desvelado / revolviendo la inquieta fantasía, / quise de algunas cosas de esta historia / descargar con la pluma la memoria” (2.17.34). Bellona then spirits him away to a mountaintop from which she prophesies Felipe II’s siege of Saint-Quentin, a mantic vision as a palliative to writer’s block:

Que viéndote a escribir aficionado
 como se muestra bien por el indicio,
 pues nunca te han la pluma destemplado
 las fieras armas y áspero ejercicio;
 tu trabajo tan fiel considerado,
 sólo movida de mi mismo oficio,
 te quiero yo llevar en una parte
 donde podrás sin límite ensancharte. (Ercilla 2.17.41)

Envisioning a spectacular victory over the French offers teleological clarity of vision the Arauco War lacks. Felipe II's oversight of imperial forces at Saint-Quentin is a synecdoche of his global rule; by dint of providence, destiny enables victory anywhere the monarch's standard flies, "pues se extiende su centro y monarquía / hasta donde remata el sol su vía" (Ercilla 3.37.14). This echoes Bellona's earlier claim that "cuando ya no baste esfuerzo humano / ya la fuerza al trabajo se rindiere, /... será entonces de todos conocido / lo que puede Felipe y es temido" (Ercilla 2.18.43). Woken from his mantic dream, Ercilla seemingly has a firmer grasp on the role of destiny in Habsburg Spain's Araucanian endeavor - indeed, so much that his hand cannot keep pace with his "prisa ... que decir hay tanto / que a mil desocupados escritores / que en ello trabajasen noche y día / para todos materia y campo habría" (2.19.1).

The initial spurt of productivity after Bellona's prophecy again props up the destiny in *La Araucana*, at least until an incident when a few soldiers capture Galbarino, a Mapuche warrior, and lop off his hands as punishment. The soldiers then descend into the Valley of Arauco to subdue the local population "con la segura paz y ley cristiana" (Ercilla 2.23.21). Yet Ercilla reemerges into the epic plot transfigured, already invested in a mantic side quest in which his bird's-eye view of Saint-Quentin was an opening step. Indeed, his encounter with Bellona marks the first of several prophetic episodes in the epic that the goddess herself adumbrates, promising the weary poet a full account of the Battle of Lepanto ("el futuro suceso nunca oído") upon meeting Fitón, a "mágico grande y hechicero, / el cual te informará de muchas cosas / que están aún por venir, maravillosas" (Ercilla 2.23.59, 62). During a walk one night, Ercilla encounters Fitón, who invites him to his cave. There, using "una gran poma milagrosa," the mage shares a prophetic vision of the events at Lepanto with Ercilla, normally a "cosa prohibida," yet in this case licit because the poet's "apariencias generosas / son de escribir los actos de la guerra / y por fuerza de estrellas rigurosas / tendrás materia larga en esta tierra, / dejaré de aclararte algunas cosas / que la presente poma y mundo encierra" (2.23.68, 2.23.64, 2.23.72).

Fitón goes on to prophesy in stark detail the Christian victory at Lepanto on October 7, 1571, in the same tones as Bellona does before him. His vision of what Habsburg Spain and its allies considered a smashing victory against the Ottoman Empire functions as a catalyst to achieving the imperial destiny in the Araucanía. For Ercilla, inasmuch as each soldier carries out the will of Felipe II, and inasmuch as Felipe II is preordained to lead humankind into a new golden age, the destiny's fulfillment at Lepanto can also be realized in a war on the periphery of the empire. Indeed, Juan

de Austria, Felipe's half-brother, says as much as he exhorts mariners preparing for the battle:

Vamos, pues, a vencer; no detengamos
 nuestra buena fortuna que nos llama;
 del hado el curso próspero sigamos
 dando materia y fuerzas a la fama:
 que sólo de este golpe derribamos
 la bárbara arrogancia y se derrama
 el sonoro estruendo de esta guerra
 por todos los confines de la tierra. (Ercilla 2.24.14)

Inflected in the epic imagery of the battle, this speech throws the imperial destiny into high relief, being an unstoppable "hado" that guarantees a victory so loud that it will resonate even in places like the Araucanía on the "confines de la tierra." Upon his return from Fitón's cave, an inspired Ercilla finds himself "[v]olviendo, pues, la pluma a nuestro cuento" (2.24.98). Here again, prophecy depicts destiny with ideological lucidity and consequently shuttles him back to the epic plot from which he digressed.

Although Ercilla pays a second visit to the mage's cave after reluctantly bearing witness to an execution of several Mapuche warriors, Fitón shows him a *mappa mundi* instead of another prophecy. The poet then departs on an expedition of approximately 200 men organized by García Hurtado de Mendoza, the newly-appointed governor of Chile, towards the southern reaches of the continent (Medina 65). The trek coincides with the formal surrender of Caupolicán, the Mapuche leader, to Habsburg Spain and the fragmentation of his forces (Ercilla 3.34.5-16). Even if Ercilla desired, there are no longer military feats to document through the triumphalist lens of destiny. Latent early on in *La Araucana*, this destiny's founding contradiction comes to light in the pastoral wanderings of the third part. Much of the scholarship on the poem views the third part as the apex of disillusionment with the Spanish imperial venture and the general unraveling of the epic's structure.⁶ As David Quint contends, the "inconsistent sympathies" causing the poem's alternation between digression and return permit those sympathies "to be based on other criteria than power, and it thus permits a critique of ideology" (178). Although Ercilla's sympathy for the Mapuche cause does make possible such a critique, it becomes especially meaningful during the southbound journey when Ercilla realizes that this ideology and its corresponding

concept of destiny not only fail to fulfill their prophesied mission but actually cause the iron age they seek to overcome.

On the eve of the reconnaissance mission towards the Strait of Magellan, Hurtado de Mendoza exhorts his retinue of soldiers with a sense of resolve reminiscent of the prophecies earlier in the poem: “Nación a cuyos pechos invencibles / no pudieron poner impedimentos / peligros y trabajos insufribles, / veis otro nuevo mundo, que encubierto / los cielos hasta ahora le han tenido” (Ercilla 3.35.5-6). Inserting the possibility of future glory into his soldiers’ minds guarantees them “cuanto os ha Fortuna prometido, / que siendo de tan grande empresa autores, / habéis de ser sin límite señores / ... pues en dos largos mundos no cabiendo, / venís a conquistar otro tercero, / donde podrán mejor sin estrecharse / vuestros ánimos grandes ensancharse” (Ercilla 3.35.6-7). Along with the promise of glory and wealth, significant in Hurtado de Mendoza’s observation that the “nuevo mundo” was hidden from sight until they stumbled upon it, which spurs his men towards the ends of the earth. Even if their motives are far from religious, that the colonizers often conflated material and spiritual conquest situates this “esperanza” well within the imperial destiny’s purview. And for much of the expedition, hope is often the only form of sustenance they have, a hardship from which Tunconabala, a Mapuche ally familiar with the Ancud region attempts to dissuade them from suffering.⁷

In *La Araucana*, Tunconabala performs a function that is similar, albeit less expressive, to that of the Velho do Restelo in Luís de Camões’s *Os Lusíadas* (1572). The Velho do Restelo longs for the halcyon days of prehistoric innocence, when humanity contented itself with nature’s bounty. For him, it is myth of Eden, of the lost Arcadia that conjures up the pastoral *locus amoenus* as an emblem of “that self-contained age before men sailed the sea or built walls around cities” (Giamatti 30).⁸ Tunconabala, who lives on the periphery of the Arauco War, seems intent on preventing Hurtado de Mendoza’s regiment from continuing its journey. While not invoking images of the golden age directly, as does the Velho, Tunconabala does admonish the soldiers that however “loable” their ambition may be, it will surely lead them to ruin:

Oh gente infeliz, a esta montaña
 por falso engaño y relación traída, ...
 ¿Qué información siniestra, qué noticia
 incita así vuestro ánimo invencible?
 ¿Qué dañado consejo o qué malicia
 os ha facilitado lo imposible?

Frenad, aunque loable, esa codicia
 que la empresa es difícil y terrible;
 y vais sin duda todos engañados
 a miserable muerte condenados. (Ercilla 3.35.15-16)

Although Ercilla and his fellow men pay heed to the warnings of towering mountains and the inhospitable stretches of land that lie ahead, their “codicia” drives them onward with “la esperanza de bienes y riqueza” (Ercilla 3.35.28). Like Gama’s fleet, the band sets out towards the vast unknown with an indigenous guide to wage a weeklong battle against the elements in the Ancud.

What becomes clear as Hurtado de Mendoza’s soldiers hack their way through the brush to “henchir del apetito la medida” is that the journey is a metonymy of how the Spanish Habsburg imperial destiny unfurls (Ercilla 3.35.27). It inevitably begins with a prophecy (such as Hurtado de Mendoza’s speech), followed by protracted toil against a common enemy - be it the Ottomans, the Mapuche, or the elements in high latitudes. A critique often highlights the purpose and resolve of those who aspire to fulfill destiny, as is the case with Camões’s Velho do Restelo and Ercilla’s Tunconabala. At least in the case of *La Araucana*, fulfillment presupposes passage through the grim depths of an iron age to arrive bloodied and tattered at the dawn of a new golden age. The landscape south of the Araucanía itself comes to embody this prophetic journey through the ages of man, “descubriendo / siempre más arcabucos y breñales, / la cerrada espesura y paso abriendo / con hachas, con machetes y destrales” (Ercilla 3.35.31). Even the sky, mirroring the iron hues of their tools, covers the wayfarers with “espesas nubes lóbregas” that transform “en tenebrosa noche el día” (Ercilla 3.35.33). As assured as the empire they serve of “la gloria que el trabajo aseguraba,” Hurtado de Mendoza’s ragged band tramps through the Ancud “[s]iete días perdidos ... / abriendo a hierro el impedido paso” (Ercilla 3.35.40). Relying on “hierro” to clear an “impedido paso” to arrive at “el espacioso y fértil raso” at the east end of Llanquihue Lake is metonymic of the eschatological path laid out for Felipe II (Ercilla 3.35.40).

That Ercilla and his fellow soldiers undergo exactly seven days of toil before reaching the Gulf of Ancud bears strong apocalyptic implications. The golden age in the Garden of Eden was the fruit of a seven-day creation cycle, while the New Jerusalem comes by way of the seven seals the Lamb of God opens, the first of which unleashes the four horsemen of the apocalypse (Revelation 6:1-17). Whether an allusion to Genesis or to Revelation, Ercilla recounts the sheer exhaustion - “la aquejadora hambre

miserable" - and his fellow soldiers' bloodcurdling cries for "¡ayuda!" muffled in "húmidos pantanos" (3.35.34-36). Faithful to their cause, the soldiers nonetheless weather these hardships, slashing through them with the same "hierro" as the age in which they live. Their trek soon leads them onto a smooth plain that passes near Llanquihue Lake and leaves off on the shores of the Gulf of Ancud. Here, as Rosa Perelmuter-Pérez suggests, "[a]l penetrar el archipiélago los soldados españoles abandonan ... la guerra, actividad propia de la edad de hierro" (143). Each soldier, beside himself with joy for coming across the idyllic paradise, finds solace amidst "innumerables islas deleitosas / cruzando por uno y otro lado / góndolas y piraguas presurosas" (Ercilla 3.35.41).

Yet, in entering this third world - the "otro tercero" Hurtado de Mendoza promises his men - , Ercilla realizes that an Amerindian golden age is alive and well in the present. It is neither an archaic fantasy to be restored nor a messianic future to be entailed; rather, it is an insular reality he and his fellow soldiers stumble upon in a state of destitution. After a friendly discussion about the intentions of the weary "[h]ombres o dioses rústicos," a few *chilotes* (i.e., the Chono and Huilliche peoples) pull up in gondolas replete with maize, fruit, and fish, which they offer "sin rescate, sin cuenta ni medida" (Ercilla 3.36.4, 12).⁹ He marvels at the "sincera bondad y la caricia / de la sencilla gente," surefire proof that "la codicia / aún no había penetrado aquellas sierras; / ni la maldad, el robo y la injusticia / (alimento ordinario de las guerras) / entrada en esta parte habían hallado / ni la ley natural inficionado" (Ercilla 3.36.13). This felicitous encounter doubles as a *mise en scène* of the conquistatorial encounter that the earliest explorers rendered in classical and biblical terms, the outcome of which Ercilla is deeply wary. Seemingly, it also occasions a fresh start that, as Ricardo Padrón observes, is implicit in Hurtado de Mendoza's claim that "since two worlds are not enough to accommodate them, they must conquer a third, where they will have power without limit" (222). Ercilla's wonderment upon entering a hitherto unknown *locus amoenus* rehearses the scripts of first contact that Beatriz Pastor Bodmer considers a "condensed representation of all the events that took place throughout the century spanned by conquest" (258). Images of the biblical Garden of Eden, Hesiod's "golden race," or Ovid's golden "first age" that the early modern European imaginary projected onto the Americas resurface just as Ercilla suffers more pangs of unease about his presence there (Hesiod 67; Ovid 7). The hollow and, indeed, pernicious effects of acting upon the prophesied destiny dawn on him in a dolorous epiphany:

Pero luego nosotros, destruyendo
 todo lo que tocamos de pasada,
 con la usada insolencia el paso abriendo
 les dimos lugar ancho y ancha entrada;
 y la antigua costumbre corrompiendo,
 de los nuevos insultos estragada,
 plantó aquí la codicia su estandarte
 con más seguridad que en otra parte. (3.36.14)

The expedition, having pried open a forbidden door, does not simply besmirch paradise by coming into contact with it. While this thrust of “hierro” into the Ancud certainly “ha dado cabida a la corrupción, y ante el cual ha de ceder, ha cedido ya, por el mero hecho del fugaz contacto con los españoles, la edad áurea” (Perelmuter-Pérez 144), the consequences for Habsburg Spain are far more dire. As I have mentioned above, the scholarship on *La Araucana* almost universally agrees that critiques of this sort are leveled against the enterprise in the Americas and are not brought to bear on conflicts in the Old World. To view this as an isolated incident, as the annihilation of a third world paradise, prevents it from spreading back into the New and Old Worlds.

However, insofar as the Spanish Habsburg destiny augurs Christ’s millennial kingdom, and insofar as it requires an iron age to reach it, this incident, however devastating it may be, is not an exception to, but the fundamental ethos of empire. The golden age discovered in the Ancud does not (indeed, cannot) survive when confronted with a destiny that, by way of prophecy, assumes that no such age can come into being but with Spanish hands. In lamenting that “nosotros, destruyendo / todo lo que tocamos de pasada,” then, Ercilla acknowledges this stark contradiction: they are prophesied to destroy an actual golden age in the name of a potential one (3.36.14). The sojourners, for the sake of destiny, face the prickly matter of visiting destruction upon the very paradise they seek to create, of annihilating a *locus amoenus* known for the “sincera bondad y la caricia / de la sencilla gente” (Ercilla 3.36.13). To do so, they must endure an age of iron and paradoxically bear arms to eliminate the need for those arms in the first place. This destiny becomes clearest in Hurtado de Mendoza’s invitation to his men to bear “el difícil camino y paso abierto” in order that they may conquer “nuevas provincias y regiones, / donde os tienen los hados a la entrada / tanta gloria y riqueza aparejada” (3.35.8). Since it fits into the global scheme of the Spanish Habsburg Empire, however, it is perhaps not the exception that much of the recent criticism on *La Araucana* believes it to be.¹⁰

The prophecies of Saint-Quentin and Lepanto open their own “paso abierto” that allows for legitimization and, by the same token, critique. If death and destruction are purported to be inconvenient costs or exceptions to the universally redemptive ends of Habsburg Spain’s imperial venture, they are revealed to be its constitutive elements during Ercilla’s southward quest. And inasmuch as this episode is paradigmatic of every colonial encounter, as Bodmer would have it, then its patent “[c]orruption is no longer perceived in isolation but as something inseparable from violence, regardless of the purpose or ideology behind it” (261). Similarly, as Karina Galperin says of the Ercilla’s souring attitude over the years, “[w]hat he sees in South America taints his global perception of all imperial endeavors: the same flaws drive the Spaniards, and the same destruction results from their conduct in either place” (42). What comes as a hint early in the poem Ercilla paints in broad brushstrokes during his stay in the Ancud, namely, that the “nosotros” that ruins everything it touches has sweeping applications. Being a deictic pronoun, it may simply refer to the men on the trek or the Spanish presence in the Americas. But if the destiny he follows into the south is the same as what Felipe II is prophesied to realize at Saint-Quentin and Juan de Austria at Lepanto, then this “nosotros” casts a net over the entire empire. Because these prophetic crutches open their own “paso abierto” from the Old World into the New (and “tercero”) World, more than signaling the failure of destiny, Ercilla’s epiphany negates any belief that an apocalyptic golden age can be reached through iron age struggle at all. Even under the aegis of the Last World Emperor or Second Charlemagne, any golden age attained by these means is already tainted, and thus, a simulacrum, a gilded age that faintly conceals its gruesome foundation.

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NOTES

- 1 Originating in an oracle attributed to the Tirburtine Sibyl around 380 CE, the myth of the Last World Emperor legend first appeared in the Latin West in the eighth century by way of Pseudo-Methodius, a Syrian monk living a French monastery, whose slapdash translation from Greek to Latin was polished and amended over the following centuries to suit the needs of the moment. Like Pseudo-Methodius, who was horrified by the spread of Islam, theologians in the wake of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 scrambled for explanations for what was occurring, spurring hopes that a powerful leader

would save them from doom at the height of their tribulations (McGinn 8). In Pseudo-Methodius's words, "[t]hen all of a sudden affliction and trouble will come to them, and the king of the Greeks, that is, of the Romans, will spring upon them in a great anger and he will be aroused like a man from drunken sleep, whom men reckoned to be dead and good for nothing" (127-129). Though warped over the centuries to honor medieval European monarchs like Charlemagne or King Arthur, the legend largely remained the same: a mighty leader would wrench Christendom from the jaws of destruction and usher in a golden age. But soon, the gates restraining Gog and Magog would fly open and both tribes would flood out to wreak havoc upon the world. Acknowledging the futility of resistance, the Emperor would journey to Jerusalem, place his crown on the site of the cross at Golgotha, and pass away, thereby creating a power vacuum. The Antichrist would then appear to assert dominion over the earth until Christ's second coming and Last Judgment (Pseudo-Methodius 135-139).

- 2 When Carlos V relinquished both of his titles in 1556, the bright-eyed Felipe II found himself saddled with a war against France over the control of Italy. During a key battle in the conflict, the newly crowned monarch's commander, Emmanuel Philibert, Duke of Savoy, defeated French forces outside of the coastal city of Saint-Quentin. Felipe II arrived to witness the taking of Saint-Quentin on August 10, 1557 that quickly turned into a sack. Horrified, he famously asked himself out loud, "¿Y esto es lo que tanto apasiona a mi padre?" (Álvarez 768). That Ercilla would select this battle among several fought between Habsburg and French forces in the last two years of this conflict is intriguing. Omitted in *La Araucana*, Felipe II's distaste for the cruelty of war casts a long shadow over his newly inherited empire. The seeds of doubt sowed during the battle, which by all accounts was a great victory, clash with the outpouring of providentialist explanations of the Holy League's victory at Lepanto in 1571, notwithstanding its ephemeral impact on the balance of power in the Mediterranean (Elliott, *Imperial Spain* 241).
- 3 For example, see Fuchs 379-80; Galperin 65; Lagos 185; Nicolopulos 65; Padrón 198; Quint 181.
- 4 For more on millenarian beliefs among the Franciscans in the Americas, see John Leddy Phelan's *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World* (1956).
- 5 *La Araucana* draws its substance from two wells: the literary and the historical, although both interpenetrate each other. As an epic poem wrought in refined Castilian, it reflects Virgil's *Aeneid* (c. 29-19 BCE), Lucan's *Pharsalia* (c. 61-65 CE), Juan de Mena's *Laberinto de la fortuna* (1444), Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516), and Garcilaso de la Vega's poetic oeuvre (fl. 1522-36). On the other hand, during his lengthy stay in Lima before departing to the

Araucanía, Ercilla had ample time to speak with veterans about their first-hand experiences (Durand 371). Other than his own story and the testimonies of those he met, by the 1560s, he may have buttressed the historical material in *La Araucana* with a nascent but blossoming set of chronicles about the Peruvian viceroyalty, such as Jerónimo de Vivar, *Crónica y relación copiosa y verdadera de los reinos de Chile* (1558), and Juan Cristóbal Calvete de Estrella's writings on the conquest and colonization of the Americas, especially in the Viceroyalty of Peru in *De rebus indicis*, written sometime after 1556. For more on Ercilla's possible sources, see Durand 368-72, 388-89; and Nicolopolos, 65-117.

- 6 For instance, Lagos reads the third part of *La Araucana* more as an act of self-destruction precipitated by the clash between the religious ideals and the gruesome reality of conquest: "las 'digresiones' y 'desviaciones' del relato de la guerra de Arauco no son sino las formas particulares que adopta la disyunción del narrador con una materia de la que ahora se siente totalmente alejado, distanciado, 'divertido.' ... Si el poema se ha programado para cantar la empresa de conquista religiosa de los bárbaros, si es concebido como 'memoria' de las hazañas de los cristianos, *esta programación es destruida por los mismos acontecimientos relatados*, por la misma empresa de la conquista" (185). Similarly, in a recent article, Karina Galperin contends that the atrocities committed in the Araucanía threaten to spill over into other imperial ventures. What happens during the Arauco War is not the exception, but the rule of empire, full of horrors that "push Ercilla into a critical, indeed into an antiwar position that view even the greatest victories as evidence for the very weaknesses of the victors. ... What he sees in South America taints his global perception of all imperial endeavors: the same flaws drive the Spaniards, and the same destruction results from their conduct in either place" (Galperin 39).
- 7 In a study that compares documentation of Hurtado de Mendoza's expedition with Ercilla's version in *La Araucana*, Carlos Keller attests to the harsh conditions of the Ancud region, by which "debe entenderse aquí la región que sigue al sur del seno de Renoncaví y del canal de Chacao" (54). He also corroborates Tunconabala's warnings of the difficulty of crossing into it because "la mayor parte de la región estaba ocupada por una selva pluvial, muy densa, con espesa vegetación subarbórea, llena de ríos, ñadis y mallines, designando la lengua araucana por ñadis a terrenos cubiertos por bosques en que temporalmente corre agua y por mallines, a los auténticos pantanos" (Keller 54; cf. Ercilla 3.34.61 and Medina 67).
- 8 A mainstay in pastoral and epic literature, *locus amoenus* or "lovely place" figured prominently in images of the proverbial golden age. Homer and Theocritus left footsteps that Roman poets retraced, most famously in Virgil and continued in Horace's *Odes* (23 and 13 BCE) and particularly *Epode II*,

Ovid's *Fasti* (8 CE) and *Silvæ* (c. 45-96 CE), Juvenal's *Satires* (c. late first century CE), Tertullian's *Apology* (c. early third century CE), and Lactantius's *De Ave Phoenice* (c. 300 CE). Renaissance poets such as Petrarch and Poliziano revived this leitmotif in the late Middle Ages, leaving a lasting impact on European lyric and epic poetry through the early modern period. See Giamatti 33-48 and 67-83.

- 9 Although an indigenous people commonly known as the *chilotes* live in contemporary Chile, the group that Habsburg Spanish explorers encountered in the 1530s was both ethnically and culturally distinct. These earlier *chilotes* developed a reputation for the "carácter pacífico y sumiso" they showed to the soldiers on Hurtado de Mendoza's expedition and, after a century of war and colonization, numbered about half of its total at the beginning of the conquest (Keller 62). Following Rodolfo Urbina Burgos's demographic history of the Chiloé Archipelago, with the foundation of Castro by Martín Ruiz de Gamboa in 1567, the indigenous population of nearly 50,000 plummeted to approximately 3,000 *tributarios* (i.e., 15,000 individuals) by 1599 and a mere 5,000 indigenes by 1700 (Urbina Burgos, *Población* 45). The Chonos vanished from the historical record altogether by the end of the eighteenth century, due largely to intermarriage with the Huilliche people (Urbina Burgos, "Chiloe" 42). In the Araucanía as a whole, Rolando Mellafe Rojas posits that the number of inhabitants dropped from one million in the mid-sixteenth century to half that figure by the middle of the next (226). An earlier study by Mario Barros Van Buren observes an equally precipitous fall from around 700,000 indigenes at the end of the sixteenth century to 300,000 in the late seventeenth and to 250,000 at the close of the eighteenth century (23).
- 10 For example, contrast Galperin's account of this consensus with her own, cogent reading of the revised Dido narrative (35-42) with Lagos 180; Lerner 38; Pierce 56-62. Arguing that Ercilla's poem at once embodies Virgil's *Aeneid* and Lucan's *Pharsalia*, Quint concludes that Ercilla's poem tears itself apart by swinging wildly between pro-indigenous and pro-Spanish positions (178; 181-82).

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