

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Moore, Cyrus. Love, War, and Classical Tradition in the Early Modern Transatlantic World: Alonso de Ercilla and Edmund Spenser

Aaron Taylor Miedema

Volume 39, Number 2, Spring 2016

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1086563ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v39i2.26873>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Miedema, A. (2016). Review of [Moore, Cyrus. Love, War, and Classical Tradition in the Early Modern Transatlantic World: Alonso de Ercilla and Edmund Spenser]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 39(2), 204–206. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v39i2.26873>

Moore, Cyrus.

Love, War, and Classical Tradition in the Early Modern Transatlantic World: Alonso de Ercilla and Edmund Spenser.

Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 444. Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2014. Pp. xiii, 236. ISBN 978-0-86698-492-8 (hardcover) US\$68.

As new academic disciplines become established, it is only a matter of time before they will influence and be engaged by related disciplines. Transatlantic history, for example, coalesced as a discipline in its own right in the late 1990s, evolving out of studies of empire and metropole, the slave trade, and the application of post-colonial theory to the Americas. Transatlantic history was embraced by comparative literature, and the field of transatlantic literary studies was born in the opening years of this century. This is only natural given the free flow of intellectual ideas between disciplines in the humanities.

Cyrus Moore's *Love, War, and Classical Tradition in the Early Modern Transatlantic World* clearly fits itself into this fledgling discipline. Moore endeavours to draw broad themes out of a close reading of excerpts from Alonso di Ercilla's three books of *La Araucana* (first published in 1569, 1578, and 1589) and Edmund Spenser's two books of *The Faerie Queene* (first published in 1590 and 1596). Moore frames his investigation of these texts within each author's experiences as both writers and participants in the imperial enterprise of the sixteenth century. In so doing, Moore shows how the imperial experience challenged, influenced, and modified classical models of writing.

Alonso di Ercilla was a Spanish courtier who, initially at least, was in favour with the imperial crown and a trusted ambassador of Emperor Charles V. However, in 1554 Ercilla departed his duties in Europe to participate in the suppression of the Auracan uprising in Chile, which had begun the year before. The discontent was due primarily to the Spanish use of slave labour to work gold deposits found in the region in 1552. The uprising was at first successful with many bloody setbacks for the Spanish; however, the tide shifted as the Spanish brutally suppressed the region. Ercilla's *La Araucana* is an epic verse narrative of the uprising and its suppression. Moore observes that the Spanish pursuit of gold and the atrocities committed on both sides meant that Ercilla's support for the Empire was troubled. Moore's study of Ercilla focuses on how individual characters, both Auracan and Spanish, must navigate their way

through the world of the poem and are either undone or show themselves to be of a good character.

Edmund Spencer was involved more in the bureaucracy of Empire than in military conquest. He first appeared in Ireland in 1580, serving the Lord Deputy for Ireland, Arthur Grey. There, Spencer increased his land holdings and took the opportunity to develop his talents as a poet. After 1590, he split his time between Ireland, in the role of land owner, and London where he published his poetry and sought a position at court. However, his situation was made more desperate in 1596 when a revolt in Ireland deprived him of his lands. Spencer was far less troubled by the oppressive nature of empire than Ercilla. His *View of the Present State of Ireland* (written in 1596) advocated for the destruction of Irish custom and language.

Moore takes great pains to examine the similarities and differences between authors and their respective works. His comparisons typically fall into two broad categories: first, the response of the two authors to the classical tradition of poetry; second, their response to the Italian humanist literary traditions of the first half of the sixteenth century.

Moore finds that both authors are of one mind in regards to the classical modes of literature; more specifically, Virgil. While some of the themes of the *Aeneid* are borrowed—for example, the shame of defeat and flight followed by redemption—Moore finds that both authors tend to reject Virgil and embrace the more free-style Ramist literary forms that appeared in the second half of the sixteenth century. According to Moore, both authors were engaged in re-inventing the classical modes of poetry.

Moore argues that the key differences between Ercilla and Spencer lie in their response to Italian humanist work of the sixteenth century; he classifies Ercilla as a renovator of the classical tradition, and Spencer as a transformer of it. Moore sees the differences as primarily driven by historical context and literary genre; in terms of genre, Moore observes that Ercilla draws upon romantic modes found in Ariosto, while Spencer draws more on the pastoral traditions of Tasso. In addition to poetic influences, Moore pays close attention to the critical and literary response to the impact of Castiglione's *Il Cortigiano*. For Ercilla, whose formative years occurred in the first half of the century, Castiglione's sense of self-fashioning was influential. But for Spencer, the influence of *Il Cortigiano* in the post-Reformation English court was dominated by figures like the Cecils, Walsingham, and the Earl of Essex. For Spencer and the

Elizabethan poets, Moore claims, the performative nature of Castiglione's work was viewed with significantly more cynicism than was felt by Ercilla and his contemporaries.

As is typical of a work of literary theory, Moore's work is laden with theoretical concepts and jargon that make *Love, War, and the Classical Tradition* a thought-provoking but heavy read. His attempts to place the work of each author within a historical and literary context provide an example of how deeply scholars can probe their sources. Readers will likely be envious of the manner in which Moore is able to knit together the poems and the events in the authors' lives. However, the study focuses only on limited excerpts of the texts of these two epic poems, which naturally draws a little skepticism at the breadth of Moore's conclusions.

AARON TAYLOR MIEDEMA

York University

Mullaney, Steven.

The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015. Pp. x, 231. ISBN 978-0-226-54763-3 (hardcover) US\$35.

In his highly influential *The Place of the Stage: License, Play and Power in Renaissance England*, Steven Mullaney argued that the relative freedom of the Shakespearean theatre from conventional ideology was grounded in its location in the liberties and suburbs of London. In his new book, Mullaney's focus shifts to the interiors of the late-Elizabethan amphitheatres. He offers a rewarding analysis of ways in which plays including *Titus Andronicus*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and Shakespeare's early histories refract their alienated cultural conditions as they make the theatre itself into an agent in a critical public sphere.

The book opens with a gripping meditation on the significance of the Edwardian purging of the great charnel of St. Paul's Cathedral. For Mullaney, the purge serves as an emblem of traumatizing Reformist efforts to sever their present from their past, but which also conditioned a theatre that helped Elizabethans grasp the processes and manage the consequences of that