

Eighteenth-Century Oratory
and Poetic Contests in Peru:
Bermúdez de la Torre
and Peralta Barnuevo.
A Critical Edition of Seven Texts

By

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Preface

Sin duda que el odio o la emulación son pasiones de privilegio en la jurisdicción de la creencia, y que constituyen más doctos en los hechos a los que están más ajenos de los instrumentos.

PERALTA BARNUEVO, *Historia de España vindicada*

C RITICS OF COLONIAL LATIN American letters have long debated whether the literary friendship between Pedro Bermúdez de la Torre y Solier and Pedro Peralta Barnuevo was defined by rivalry. As this book will demonstrate through a study of the authors' individual and collective works, the spirit of competition was academic, not antagonistic, and this resulted in both poets participating in creative venues that yielded compositions admired by patrons and the public. Writings that they published, both individually and jointly, compliment one another and point more to collaboration than contention. I have concluded that one of the reasons modern critics have been quick to label professional "rivalry" that which embraced the spirit of poetic jousts and jocundity—as revealed in the poems from the academy of viceroy Castell-dos-Rius, to which both poets belonged and where they presented individually and collectively—is due to a lack of scrutiny and superficial reading of the texts under study. The two authors, their works, and others like them, were once dismissed, even as late as 1962, as illustrative of a literature that was ceremonial and repulsive. In that vein, it was possible to focus on seemingly unflattering attributes and dismiss Bermúdez and Peralta, without arriving at a full appreciation of their belletristic merit.

Was there room in the lives of Bermúdez and Peralta for rivalry within the academy circles they patronized? Although from different class backgrounds, they founded a literary friendship based on mutual admiration and respect. They lauded each other in poetry and prose,

and on several occasions even poked good-natured fun at one another in print. The case for enmity has been overstated in that it fails to consider that each writer was an accomplished intellectual in his own right, had achieved recognition at an early stage in his own career, and was supported by a fertile and nurturing environment in Lima. They competed neither for resources nor for learned salons, and other academic supports were not in short supply. They were not dueling poets. The nature of competing in poetic contests was not destructive, but rather constructive, because it made it possible for relative excellence to manifest itself and for innovation and experimentation—as well as cooperation and exchanges—to take place. Personal and professional enmity, jealousy, or rivalry is a misstatement or an exaggeration, for there is no record of mutual hostility or prejudicial or even baneful influences. What the record does demonstrate is that where Peralta has been the focus of increased scholarly attention and debate, Bermúdez has remained a marginal footnote, and rarely cited in histories, anthologies, and courses on Latin American literature. During his lifetime, Peralta's literary output exceeded that of Bermúdez, many of whose writings are still unpublished. Peralta garnered international recognition of his talents, and Bermúdez was appreciated for his erudition and service to numerous viceroys. Both Limeneans were seasoned academicians and true products of the university system. Part of the reason their writings have been disregarded can be traced directly to two centuries of negative assessments of eighteenth century Peruvian letters, particularly poetry, with successive critics repeating in dialog, almost verbatim, the disparaging remarks of one another. This book seeks to address that volley of criticism and restore the poetry and oratory of Bermúdez and Peralta to the colonial literary tradition to which they belong.

The texts presented here are reproduced for the first time since their original publication, which dates between 1699 and 1745, spanning 46 years of celebratory poetry and prose writings. They are faithful models of compositions linked to literary academies and university halls, where poetic jousts or contests were governed by fixed rules. This is the only edition of its kind to study comparatively in one volume the works of Bermúdez and Peralta. Rescuing colonial texts from archival obscurity and introducing them to a new readership of both students and scholars continues to lie at the heart of the new direction that characterizes Latin American Studies. In interpreting the literary legacy of Bermúdez and

Peralta, it is necessary to elucidate the scholastic environment in which they toiled and created. A study of that legacy would be incomplete without bringing into focus their status as colonial subjects, the use of their talents to pay tribute to the Spanish Crown and viceregal governments that they served, their personal and political lives, their readership and the influence the literature of Spain and the rest of Europe exerted on their creativity, and their love of Peru or, as they framed it, *nuestra criolla nación*. Bermúdez and Peralta utilized rhetorical proscriptions and equivocal language (puns, double-speak, idioms, colloquialisms, regionalisms) that were intelligible to their readership, a readership that could be said to be in complicity with the authors' design. Students and scholars of the humanities (fellow academy members) would have had few problems, if any, addressing textual indeterminacy, filling in gaps that functional, ambiguous language demanded of them, or recognizing literary discourses aimed at recreating the socio-cultural milieu that gave rise to the works. Bermúdez and Peralta, reflections of their century and colonial situation, are best appreciated when read in the light of *culteranismo* and early Enlightenment influences that are evident in their writings. In publishing these selected works, my intention is to allow both writers to argue—in prose and poetry—the case for a reappraisal of their contributions to Peruvian and Latin American literature. To that end, in order to compare and contrast texts, a brief essay, and not an *explication de texte*, introduces each transcription and is designed to facilitate the reader's comprehension.

In the process of transcribing and editing, spelling has been modernized and punctuation adapted to present-day use. In selected instances, run-on sentences have been shortened. All abbreviations follow the original, upper case letters commonly found in adjectives and nouns have been eliminated, and proper nouns and spellings based on the Latin have been modernized (*teatro* over *theatro*, *Aguiles* over *Achiles*, *reino* over *reyno*). I have reproduced verbatim the marginal notes and have indicated for each text where renumbering or reordering was required because of either faulty pagination or alphabetization in the original. Brackets indicate where words or phrases are broken, missing, or illegible.

The original Latin at times contains abbreviated sentences where it was necessary to fill in the omissions within brackets. I have left intact

common abbreviations: *D.* or *Doct.* for *Doctor*, *D.* for *Don*, *Exc.* for *Excelencia*, *l.* or *lib.* for *libro*, *n.* for *nota*, *tit.* for *titulo*, *hist.* for *historia*, *S.* for *San*, *S. E.* for *Su Excelencia*, and *S. M.* for *Su Magestad*, among others. Certain abbreviations of Latin and Spanish words I have resolved only at their first occurrence in order to show the reader the intricate style, order, and paleographic peculiarities of the texts: for example, *var.* as *var[ia]*, *Reg.* as *Reg[es]*, *paneg.* as *panegyricus*, *Sueton.* as *Sueton[us]*, and *Tacit.* as *Tacit[us]*. Peralta's abbreviations are inconsistent and do not follow any set pattern: *hist.* and *histor.* for *historia*, *l.* and *lib.* for either the Spanish *libro* or the Latin *librus*, *libri*, and other cases. To identify the source of most Latin quotes, Peralta provides either a number or letter as a reference. The English translation of the majority of Latin quotes has been placed in parentheses following the source reference in the endnotes. Otherwise, a footnote conveys the translation. As the primary goal of this book is to provide an introduction to the individual and collaborative literary efforts of Bermúdez and Peralta, the bibliography serves as a reference guide for enriching the reading and interpretation of the original texts.

I dedicate this book to Neal A. Messer, in appreciation of his gifts for all things colonial.

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