

THE EVOLUTION OF THE LEGACY OF LOPE DE AGUIRRE

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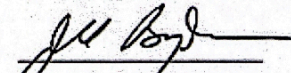
WITH HONORS IN HISTORY

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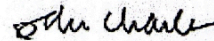
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## Abstract

Austin Tyler. The Evolution of the Legacy of Lope de Aguirre.

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This thesis is a historiographical study of the legacy of the sixteenth-century Basque rebel, Lope de Aguirre. The thesis compares and contrasts the various historical and literary interpretations of Aguirre, spanning from his death in 1561 up until the present day. Chapter 1 is a biographical narrative of Aguirre's life and recounts the 1560-61 expedition of Pedro de Orsúa in search of the Kingdoms of El Dorado and Omagua and Aguirre's subsequent Marañones Rebellion. Chapter 2 analyzes the written accounts of the Ex-Marañones who accompanied Aguirre during his rebellion and how in service of their own interests, they produced a distorted representation of Aguirre. Chapter 3 focuses on the writings of the *cronistas*, colonial-era chroniclers who produced retellings of Aguirre's story from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries. Chapter 4 analyzes the treatment of Aguirre's legacy during the nineteenth century, when he was revived as a revolutionary icon across Latin America and Europe. Chapter 5 looks at the treatment of Aguirre's legacy during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries when he was revived as a historical figure, though still used to make political points. Ultimately, this thesis will show that in the three and a half centuries since his death, the legacy of Lope de Aguirre has been repeatedly reinterpreted and repurposed by subsequent generations in varying lights. These interpretations were heavily influenced by each author's own underlying intentions and the prevailing values of their own eras. This thesis adds to modern attempts at understanding the historiographical treatment of Aguirre as a historical and literary figure and prompts further inquiries into the problem of historical biography.

Keywords: Historiography, Colonial Latin America, Rebellion, Lope de Aguirre

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### **A Note On The Use of Translated Sources**

Given that this thesis utilizes a combination of English and Spanish sources, I was required to directly translate several of the Spanish accounts myself. However, I also used several translations of previous authors. In particular, Felix Jay's *Sin, Crimes, and Retribution in Early Latin America: A Translation and Critique of Sources - Lope De Aguirre, Francisco de Carvajal, Juan Rodríguez Freyle*, is a selection of primary accounts, translated by the author. Similarly, I have used William Bollaert's translation of Pedro Simón's *Sixth Historical Notice of the Conquest of Tierra Firme*. Thus, unless otherwise noted in the footnotes or specified above, all translations are my own.

## Introduction

Few figures from the early colonial period in Latin America have received more attention and inspired more fascination among subsequent generations than Lope de Aguirre. Commonly referred to as “*El Tirano*” or “The Wrath of God,” Aguirre is widely known as a deranged and bloodthirsty tyrant whose 1561 rebellion against King Philip II and his Spanish-American colonial empire left a lasting trail of cruelty and violence in its wake. Like other colonial-era figures, such as Christopher Columbus and La Malinche, the way in which his image has been represented and distorted by subsequent generations reveals not only the complexity of historiography, but also reveals the complexity of understanding historical figures in one’s own period. Immigrating to the new world in the aftermath of Spain's conquest of the vast Inca and Aztec Empires, Aguirre was part of the second wave of conquistadors hoping to seize a share of the Americas' vast wealth. He failed to achieve any such riches or prized titles, discovering instead a continent whose wealth had already long been discovered, claimed, or plundered. As part of a 1561 expedition to discover the mythical kingdoms of El Dorado and Omagua under Governor Pedro de Orsúa, Aguirre participated in a mutiny, assumed command of the company, and declared war against King Philip II of Spain. He renounced allegiance to the Hapsburg monarch and his authority, and after exiting the mouth of the Amazon, he and his followers marched across Margarita Island and the Venezuelan mainland before Aguirre was killed in late 1561. Though Aguirre's rebellion failed, his actions and legacy had lasting repercussions across Spanish America.

The figure of Aguirre is perhaps best known as the main character of Werner Herzog’s 1972 historical drama, *Aguirre, The Wrath of God*, a fictional film loosely based on the 1541 El Dorado expeditions of Gonzalo Pizarro and Francisco de Orellana and the subsequent expedition of Pedro de Orsúa and Lope de Aguirre. Played by the notorious German actor Klaus Kinski, the



character of Aguirre was presented as a deranged and ruthless tyrant who led a bloody and seemingly pointless campaign down the Amazon River, executing both his men and indigenous peoples without discretion. Throughout the film, Kinski's Aguirre is gradually enveloped by his own paranoia and insanity and by the film's conclusion, the self-styled 'Wrath of God' is left as the sole survivor of the ill-fated expedition. Kinski's Aguirre is finally consumed by his own insanity and as the camera pans out, viewers are left with a parting scene of Aguirre wandering aimlessly amongst his dead compatriots as he continues to plan out his conquest of New Spain, nonsensically rambling:

“When we reach the sea, we'll build a bigger boat, and with it we'll sail north and take Trinidad away from the Spanish Crown. From there we'll go on and take Mexico from Cortés. What a great betrayal that will be! We will then control all of New Spain and we will stage history as others stage plays. I, the Wrath of God, will marry my own daughter and with her found the purest dynasty ever known to man. Together we will rule the whole of this continent. I am the Wrath - The Wrath of God - Who else is with me?”<sup>1</sup>

Werner Herzog's presentation of Lope de Aguirre as the mad and murderous conquistador, a man whose blood-fueled insanity stained the Amazon, is perhaps the best example of how Aguirre has most commonly been perceived in the roughly four centuries since his failed rebellion. However, much like Herzog's fictional character, the vast majority of depictions of Aguirre, both historical and fictional, have derived more from the author's own imagination or interests than from what we know about the historical Aguirre.

The historical importance of Aguirre's rebellion against Spain's colonial government is undoubted. It was only the second European expedition to successfully navigate the Amazon,

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<sup>1</sup> *Aguirre, The Wrath of God*, 1:29:35 to 1:32:17

following Francisco de Orellana's pioneering 1541 expedition. Secondly, Aguirre's rejection of his loyalty to King Philip II and his goal of creating a government free from regal oversight was unlike any earlier rebellion in Spanish America. Whereas earlier rebellions, namely the 1544 rebellion of Gonzalo Pizarro, were aimed at replacing the colonial government, Aguirre's rebellion was built around the notion of creating a government separated from the Spanish Crown. His only surviving writings, consisting of three letters addressed to various colonial officials and one to King Philip II himself, are some of the best representations of the discontent present in the Americas during the early colonial period. Even after four centuries, Aguirre's name is still remembered across Latin America (and in parts of Spain) as a signifier of the cruelty and violence which defined the colonial era.

From a historiographical and rhetorical viewpoint, Lope de Aguirre and his legacy are particularly interesting. In the roughly four and a half centuries since his death, there has emerged an impressive body of chronicles, historical reinterpretations, novels, and films focusing on the life and deeds of Aguirre. The sheer number of these works shows that the passage of time has done nothing to quell the fascination. Furthermore, in writing on Aguirre, each author produced a notably distinct iteration of the failed conquistador turned rebel. Much like other figures of the conquest era who went 'against the grain', such as Gonzalo Guerrero and Pedro Bohórquez, Aguirre's status as contradictory figure in his own lifetime defies easy categorization, whether as a hero or a villain. This unique treatment and such persistent fascination with the legacy of Aguirre in the centuries following his death raise several questions. In particular, how and why has the legacy of Lope de Aguirre continued to endure even four and a half centuries after his death? What interest have different writers had in retelling his story? How has the figure of Aguirre and his legacy been reconstructed by each author, and are there any hidden motivations behind each

respective narrative? And finally, what does each iteration reveal about the author and the greater societal contexts within which they were written?

In answering these questions, I will utilize the many written primary and secondary historical accounts, novels, poems, and legends which Aguirre's legacy has inspired in the centuries between his death in 1561 and up to the present day. The purpose of this thesis is not to determine whether the figure of Lope de Aguirre should be definitively viewed as a hero, madman, or villain, as many of the works I examine have attempted. Instead, I aim to examine the circumstances under which each vision of Aguirre arose in order to chronologically examine how his legacy has evolved with each successive generation and what has driven such transformation. My main argument is that the legacy of Lope de Aguirre has persisted across the historical record and been retold in various lights by various authors for specific reasons, mostly drawing from the same pool of historical documentation. That is, each successive iteration of Aguirre, both historical and literary, has been influenced by the prevailing values and tensions of the period and reformed to suit the author's own respective interests. Thus, the farther each iteration gets from the actual historical event, the less it reveals about Aguirre the man and the more it reveals about Aguirre the legend.

I make my argument in five chapters. In the first chapter, I provide a chronological overview of Lope de Aguirre's life and identify the problems and tensions of Spanish and Spanish American society in the early colonial period, all to better contextualize my analysis of the evolution of his legacy. Outside the Latin American realm, Aguirre's story is not widely known and cannot be easily categorized or summarized without losing a sense of the historical figure's complexities. Thus, a biographical narrative of his life is important to provide readers a rough understanding of exactly who the historical Aguirre was versus how subsequent generations have

interpreted him. In constructing this first chapter, I rely on a variety of primary accounts, namely the eyewitness accounts of the so-called Ex-Marañones (Aguirre's travel companions on the Amazon), as well as more recent accounts of the Basque rebel.

The second chapter puts the first generation of Aguirre chroniclers, the Ex-Marañones, under a microscope, asking how their own self-interests drove them to depict Aguirre as a villain. As this chapter will show, the Basque rebel's image was heavily distorted in order to accomplish the self-exculpatory intent of the authors themselves. The third chapter examines the evolution of Aguirre's legacy during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when chroniclers such as Pedro de Aguado, Juan de Castellanos, and Pedro Simón produced the first narratives of Aguirre as a legendary figure and how they repurposed his story as a moralizing tale. Unlike the *relaciones* of many Ex-Marañones, which were self-exculpatory accounts intended primarily for use by colonial officials, the works produced during this period were driven by an interest in “historicizing” the early colonial period and thus presented more fluid narrative accounts of Aguirre and treated him as a historical oddity.

The fourth chapter examines the emergence of Aguirre as a revolutionary icon during the period of Latin American Independence under Simón Bolívar and other leading Latin American revolutionaries of the period and how the growing notion of autonomy from Spanish oversight within Spanish America and many Spanish regions (notably the Basque Country) produced versions of Aguirre that emphasized his more redeeming attributes as a revolutionary. The fifth chapter focuses on the revival of interest in Aguirre as a historical figure and the evolution of his legacy during the twentieth century. This chapter examines the many historical reinterpretations, novels, and other biographical accounts of Aguirre produced during the past century and will

analyze the intentions of their authors and how the interest in Aguirre began to spread to non-Spanish speaking regions of the globe.

The fourth and fifth chapters distinguish between literary iterations of Aguirre and historical approaches to tackling Aguirre, the man. The conclusion connects the works and authors I analyze in the thesis to show how each iteration was part of the long trend toward using or “mining” the image and legacy of Aguirre for specific purposes and agendas. In analyzing the evolution of Aguirre narratives, both fictitious and factual, it is clear that the legacy of the conquistador is the ultimate prisoner of the written word. Since his death in 1561, subsequent generations have sampled and remolded the story and legend of Aguirre to best suit their respective agendas. Hopefully, this intensive historiographical analysis of the legacy of Lope de Aguirre will provide readers with insight into the complexity of how historians and authors of fiction alike constantly reformulate and reinterpret historical figures. In a broader sense, it will also show how easily the legacy of any historical figure can be distorted and influenced by contemporary ideals.

## **Chapter 1: A Biography of Lope de Aguirre (c.1511-1561)**

Given that Lope de Aguirre is not a widely known figure outside Latin America and perhaps Spain, this chapter aims to provide readers with a biographical overview of his life. In composing this chapter, I have utilized a variety of primary and secondary sources. However, it is crucial to note that although the following account is drawn from the most widely accepted narratives of Aguirre's life, there is still a possibility that the claims in this chapter blend historical truth and interpretation. Lope de Aguirre is a historical figure whose life is clouded in ambiguity and as such his actions left few fully-reliable primary sources. It is worth noting that, while there are often few good primary sources for any historical figure, the case of Aguirre should be considered extraordinary. In total, only three writings can be attributed to the Basque rebel and the remaining accounts are overtly biased, as the later chapters will evidence. Thus, the narrative provided in this chapter should be taken with a grain of salt. It is primarily intended to provide readers with basic background knowledge, giving a sense of who we think Lope de Aguirre was and also what we know about his times.



Figure 1.1. *Lope de Aguirre. Reconstrucción por Germán Suárez Vértiz.* Illustration by Germán Suárez Vértiz. In Juan B. Lastres and C. Alberto Segúin, *Lope de Aguirre, El Rebelde: Estudio Historia-Psicologico*, i. Lima: Ministerio de Relaciones exteriores del Perú, 1942

Pre-Expedition (1511-1558)

Very little is known about the life of Lope de Aguirre before his arrival in South America. However, a combination of sources has allowed historians to piece together a rough biography of the man who would become one of the most feared figures in sixteenth-century Peru. While no period portrait of Aguirre survives, Fray Pedro Simón's *Sixth Historical Notice of the Conquest of Tierra Firme*, first published in 1627, provides an idea (based on earlier sources) of his appearance: "When the traitor was killed, he was a little more than fifty years of age, of short stature, and sparely made, ill-featured, the face small and lean, beard black, and the eyes like a hawk's, and when he looked, he fixed them sternly, particularly when angry; he was a great and noisy talker; when well supported he was most determined, but without support he was a coward; he was very hardy, and could bear much fatigue, on foot as well as on horseback."<sup>2</sup> If Simón's physical depiction is accurate, then Lope de Aguirre would have been an intimidating individual. This is further supported by the physiognomy of Lope de Aguirre, produced by the Peruvian artist Gérman Suárez Vértiz in 1942. This illustration was based off of intensive research into the physical descriptions of the artist and in light of no such earlier artistic representations of the Basque rebel, has been accepted as the most well-known portrait of Aguirre. Almost every chronicle produced by members of Pedro de Orsúa's failed 1560 expedition down the Marañón River (today's Amazon), collectively referred to as The Ex-Marañones, describe how when Aguirre was in a frenzy, his mouth would foam at the sides and his eyes would seemingly burn with rage as he stared down his target. This fearsome description of Aguirre would follow him throughout his life and even after death. However, despite his

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<sup>2</sup> Simón, *Noticias Historiales*, 230



notorious and scandalous life, Aguirre's upbringing and life in Spain was relatively typical for the period.

Lope de Aguirre was born around 1511 in the town of Oñate, located in the Basque province of Guipúzcoa.<sup>3</sup> Aguirre's parents were of noble status and, were most definitely affluent, having made their fortune in the textile industry. It is unknown whether Aguirre had any siblings, but this was likely given his sudden departure from his hometown in his early twenties. Furthermore, El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega noted that Aguirre “was the brother of a man who was a lord of vassals in his own part of the country.”<sup>4</sup> Following a devastating epidemic in the Basque Country in the early fifteenth century, its inhabitants were faced with an exploding population, straining the region's limited resources and complicating the issue of inheritance. In response, many townships enacted an inheritance system aptly named the Oñate Program<sup>5</sup>, which allowed families to designate a sole heir for inheritances, with the remaining children receiving nothing. This program succeeded in preserving family estates as well as managing the population crisis of the region. Like many Basque children disinherited by their families, Aguirre traveled to the Spanish city of Seville in the early 1530s, likely hoping to sign up to board one of the many Spanish ships heading to the Americas. The same year in which Aguirre reached Seville, Hernando Pizarro arrived with a ship laden with the Spanish Crown's share of the massive Inca treasure, known as the king's fifth, or *quinto real*. In all, “The King and Queen of Spain received 5,200 pounds of Inca silver and 2,600 pounds of Inca gold.”<sup>6</sup> Like countless other hopeful conquistadors in Spain, Aguirre was no doubt astonished by the vast amount of wealth found in the Americas.

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<sup>3</sup> Balkan, *The Wrath of God*, 16

<sup>4</sup> Garcilaso de la Vega, *Royal Commentary on the Incas and General History of Peru*, 1274 (trans. by Livermore)

<sup>5</sup> Lamikiz, *Basques in the Atlantic*, 3

<sup>6</sup> MacQuarrie, *The Last Days of the Incas*, 124

Before even departing Spain, Aguirre had gained a reputation as a quarrelsome and fiery individual; the chronicler Francisco Vázquez wrote: “I saw this Lope de Aguirre frequently sitting in a shop belonging to a Basque tailor and deafening the whole street with his loud voice.”<sup>7</sup> Every single spot aboard a ship heading towards the Americas was highly coveted, and La Casa de la Contratación (the House of Trade of the Indies) restricted the number of emigrants, as the Spanish Crown did not want an influx of conquistadors flowing into New Spain and Peru and further complicating the already strained colonial situation. Aguirre likely used his intimidating personality to pressure his way aboard one of these ships, eventually joining an expedition under the conquistador Pedro de Heredia. In 1533, Aguirre left Seville aboard a ship crammed with 250 other hopeful conquistadors for the new world. As his ship departed from the Iberian coast to cross the Atlantic, Aguirre likely had little knowledge that it would be his last time setting eyes on his home country.

Aguirre arrived in South America in 1534, setting foot in the recently founded town of Cartagena de Indias, laid out by Pedro de Heredia only one year prior, in the Spanish territory of New Granada. The Americas Aguirre encountered were vastly different from the continents and islands touched on by Columbus only three decades prior. Between 1519 and 1521, a Spanish expedition under the conquistador Hernán Cortés succeeded in toppling the Aztec Empire, managing to seize the empire's vast territory and claim its immense mineral wealth. At the time, the Aztecs' vast riches and urbanized society amazed all Spaniards and other Europeans. Nevertheless, only ten years later, the riches of the Aztecs would be far surpassed by the enormous treasures of the Incas.

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<sup>7</sup> Minta, *Aguirre*, 8 (trans. by author)

In 1531, the conquistador Francisco Pizarro departed from Panama on his third expedition to invade the vast Inca Empire. When he and his followers arrived along the Peruvian coast, they discovered a region devastated by civil war. Like Cortés had done only ten years earlier, Pizarro organized a meeting with the newly crowned Inca, Atahualpa, with the intent of capturing him. On November 16, 1532, a force of 150 Spanish cavalymen, arquebusiers, cannoneers, and foot soldiers organized an ambush against the vastly larger Incan caravan of roughly 5,000 footmen and light infantry at Cajamarca. Pizarro and his men captured the Inca Atahualpa and slaughtered roughly 2,000 native Andeans without suffering a single casualty by the end of the day. The now imprisoned Atahualpa offered to fill a building, known as the ransom room, up to the ceiling with gold, plus another with silver twice over in exchange for his freedom. Over the next several months, the Inca emperor ordered temples, royal palaces, and settlements across the entirety of the empire to bring whatever gold or silver they may have and transport it to Cajamarca. In total, according to official accounts, Atahualpa's ransom consisted of 13,420 pounds of gold and 26,000 pounds of silver, vastly overshadowing the metallic riches Cortés had seized at Tenochtitlan.

Lope de Aguirre saw none of this. He was a late arrival, part of the second generation of conquistadors who reached the Americas hoping to seize some remaining portion of the New World's fabled wealth. However, in the bloody and violent conquest of both the Aztec and Inca Empires, the majority of lucrative *encomiendas* (tribute-producing 'fiefs') and precious metals had already been seized by the first generation of conquistadors. By the time that Hernando Pizarro arrived in Spain with the vast riches of Atahualpa's ransom, much of the remaining treasure and the most valuable *encomiendas* had already been divided among Pizarro's men, leaving very little for any new arrival to the continent, except for failure, poverty, and obscurity.

Furthermore, in the wake of the Spanish conquest of the Americas' largest kingdoms, conflicts between Spaniards vying for power resulted in the constant outbreak of rebellions and civil wars. Thus, the new world into which Aguirre was thrust was not one filled with boundless riches and opportunities but defined by endemic violence and social stratification.

Aguirre's first job in the New World was that of a grave robber.<sup>8</sup> He was tasked with looting Indigenous burial sites for any golden or precious objects. This was likely the starting point for Aguirre's disillusionment with Spanish colonial authorities, as a man of noble status would most definitely have considered such a laborious task beneath himself. Likely tired of such menial work, Aguirre spent several years traveling around the colonies, eventually ending up in Peru, where he began what was perhaps his only legitimate job as a horse-breaker. However, like his job as a grave robber, Aguirre likely found this job beneath him, and despite reportedly working for several years in a legitimate job, the increasingly frustrated would-be conquistador soon found his true calling: that of a soldier and rebel. According to Simón, “He (Aguirre) was always of a turbulent disposition, and a lover of revolts and mutinies, and during the time he was in Peru, he was engaged in nearly all of them.”<sup>9</sup> While this later characterization was likely an overstatement by Simón, it is true that from the late 1530s until 1559, when Aguirre enlisted in the fateful El Dorado expedition under Orsúa, he seemingly spent his time either engaged in rebellions, fleeing prosecution for crimes he committed, or fighting for the Crown either suppressing native populations or local revolts. In this sense, he can be considered a soldier of fortune whose loyalty was with whomever he believed best benefitted him at that time.

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<sup>8</sup> Lewis, *The Miraculous Lie*, 8

<sup>9</sup> Simón, *Noticias Historiales*, 231

Aguirre's first experience as a soldier was as a member of an expedition under Diego de Rojas in which he assisted in the pacification of the Chunchos Indians of eastern Peru during the late 1530s. He then served under Captain Diego Álvarez Holguín in a similar expedition near Callao, port of Lima. Both expeditions netted Aguirre little wealth nor a coveted title. Like countless others, he had sailed across the Atlantic to not only escape a menial life in Spain but to claim a portion of new world riches, only to discover that conditions in America were no different, if not worse, than those in Europe. On September 16, 1542, Aguirre was conscripted into the royalist army as the ongoing civil war between the Pizarrist and Almagrist supporters wreaked havoc across Peru. Likely knowing that he would gain little from participating in the conflict, Aguirre fled Peru, first to Nicaragua and then to Panama. With this act, Aguirre became a wanted man with a bounty on his head. Spending at least a year fleeing repercussions for desertion, he became involved in a relationship with a native woman who gave him a daughter, whom he named Elvira. During the early colonial period, it was common for European male to engage in relationships with native women, and according to Vásquez, Elvira was “probably [born] out of wedlock.”<sup>10</sup> According to the accounts of the Ex-Marañones, Elvira was the only person whom Aguirre showed any affection or love towards, even bringing her along during Orsúa's expedition into the Amazon.

Aguirre secured a royal pardon for his prior act of desertion by participating in the conquest of the indigenous population around the city of Nombre de Dios in modern-day Panama<sup>11</sup>, returning to Peru around 1544. In an act that seems to contradict his prior refusal to serve the royal interest in the civil war between Pizarro's and Almagro's forces in 1542, Aguirre is reported to have served under the first Viceroy of Peru, Blasco Núñez Vela, in the colonial

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<sup>10</sup> Vásquez, *El Dorado: Cronica De La Expedición De Pedro De Ursua y Lope De Aguirre*, 29

<sup>11</sup> Balkan, *The Wrath of God*, 25

authorities' attempts to enforce the New Laws of 1542. However, to further complicate his story, Aguirre then switched sides and subsequently fought against the enforcement of the New Laws under Gonzalo Pizarro, participating in the Battle of Añaquito in early 1546. Aguirre once again fought for the royalists during the 1548 revolt of Gonzalo Pizarro and Francisco de Carvajal, a.k.a. The Demon of the Andes. Aguirre's seemingly paradoxical shifting of loyalty suggests that during his roughly three decades in the Americas, he only proved loyal to one man: himself.

At this point, we glimpse one of the most interesting periods in Aguirre's life prior to his fateful cruise down the Amazon. In 1609, El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, one of the most notable chroniclers of the colonial period, published his masterpiece, *Royal Commentaries of the Incas and General History of Peru*. While most of the book focused on the Inca Empire and the subsequent conquest under Pizarro, Vega also devotes several pages to an incident involving a Spaniard only referred to as “so-and-so Aguirre.”<sup>12</sup> While it is unclear whether this man is Lope de Aguirre, it is more than probable given his track record of violence within the Americas. Furthermore, the brief account is evidence of the extremely vengeful nature of Aguirre as well as his unwavering determination.

According to Garcilaso de la Vega, Aguirre was part of a two-hundred-man convoy travelling from Potosí en route to Tucumán in 1548. The company was using indigenous Andean porters to carry their equipment, a practice specifically outlawed by the New Laws of 1542. According to the pro-Indian laws:

“We [The Crown] command that with regard to the lading of the said Indians the Audiencias take especial care that they be not laden, or in case that in some parts this cannot be avoided that it be in such a manner that no risk of life, health and preservation

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<sup>12</sup> Garcilaso de la Vega, *Royal Commentary on the Incas and General History of Peru*, 1274

of the said Indians may ensue from an immoderate burthen; and that against their own will and without their being paid, in no case be it permitted that they be laden, punishing very severely him who shall act contrary to this. In this there is to be no remission out of respect to any person.”<sup>13</sup>

While the alcalde of Potosí, Francisco de Esquivel, allowed the majority of soldiers to pass through, he arrested the last soldier in the procession (referred to as Aguirre), with the intent of punishing him for violating the New Laws by using two native porters, to serve as an example to the remaining company of soldiers.

Alcalde Esquivel sentenced Aguirre to receive a total of two-hundred lashes to his back, a punishment which could be considered harsh even for sixteenth-century colonial society. As a member of the Spanish nobility, Aguirre likely viewed this punishment as unbecoming a man of his status and humiliating and (according to El Inca Garcilaso) he begged the alcalde to hang him instead of whipping him. Even the leading citizens of Potosí appealed to Esquivel to lessen Aguirre's sentence as they too considered it too harsh for his crime. The alcalde only relented in delaying Aguirre's punishment by one week. However, when alerted of this, Aguirre refused to accept such orders, instead mounting himself atop an ass and ordering that his sentence be carried out. Prior to his lashing, Aguirre exclaimed, “I hoped not to have to get on this beast or go naked like this , but since things have come to this pass, let the sentence be carried out, and I accept it, and so we shall save the trouble and pains there would have been for these eight days in searching for intermediaries and advocates who would probably have gained as little as present ones.”<sup>14</sup> As a gentleman, Aguirre took his punishment with grace and, upon its completion, decided to remain in Potosí instead of continuing with the company to Tucumán. However,

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<sup>13</sup> Lucas and Stevens, *The New Laws of the Indies*, xv (trans. by author)

<sup>14</sup> Garcilaso de la Vega, *Royal Commentary on the Incas and General History of Peru*, 1274

Aguirre was not content with his perceived unjust treatment at the hands of the alcalde and what followed is perhaps the best example of Aguirre's unwavering determination and highly vengeful nature.

Upon Esquivel's completion of his official appointment, Aguirre began to aggressively pursue him with the intent of murdering the alcalde. Upon hearing of his vengeful pursuer, Esquivel fled to the Peruvian city of Lima. Despite the distance of over 1,000 miles, Aguirre arrived in the city within a fortnight forcing the alcalde to flee another 1,700 miles to Cuzco only to have the vengeful Basque appear a few days later. It is important to briefly note that the Aguirre-Esquivel incident, as recounted, was only included in the narrative of Garcilaso and thus it is difficult to accurately judge whether his claims are fully truthful or partially the inventions of the author himself, namely the extraordinary distance which Garcilaso claims Aguirre traversed in his pursuit of Esquivel. Turning back to the narrative, Garcilaso de la Vega reported that Aguirre pursued the alcalde for a total of three years, traveling on his bare feet, day and night. Perhaps growing tired of the relentless game of cat-and-mouse, Esquivel eventually decided to settle down in Cuzco, perhaps believing that no man would remain so determined for such an extended period. This decision was a fateful one for Esquivel, as despite wearing a chainmail shirt and always carrying a dagger with him, Aguirre managed to track him to the licentiate's residence. Entering the building via a second-story window, Aguirre found the man who had sentenced him to a public lashing three years earlier asleep in his library. Raising his dagger, Aguirre stabbed the sleeping man in his right temple and, perhaps in a fit of anger, proceeded to deal several more blows to Esquivel, who died.

Having gotten vengeance, after several years and thousands of miles, Aguirre fled the scene of the murder, knowing that such an act would without a doubt earn him a swift execution.



By this time, news of Aguirre's ceaseless pursuit of Esquivel had spread across the viceroyalty. According to de la Vega, Aguirre encountered two young noblemen, whom the author refers to as Santillán and Cataño, both the brothers-in-law of Rodrigo de Piñeda.<sup>15</sup> As proof of how notorious he had become during his pursuit of the Potosí official, the two men immediately asked Aguirre, "Have you killed Esquivel?"<sup>16</sup> to which Aguirre told them his deed and pleaded with them to hide him. Surprisingly, the two men agreed to hide Aguirre, harboring him in a pigsty and secretly bringing him food every night. Following Esquivel's murder, the Corregidor of Cuzco ordered the city to be locked down as officials searched for Aguirre, and for thirty days, all routes out of the city were placed under close supervision of armed soldiers.

Finally, after forty days, Santillán and Cataño decided that it would be safe to assist Aguirre in fleeing Cuzco. In order to disguise himself, Aguirre shaved his head and beard and, using a wild fruit named *uítoc*, dyed his skin black to appear as an African laborer. The three men dressed in tattered clothing attempted to depart the city under the guise that they were hunting game. Against all odds, Aguirre's masquerade succeeded in fooling the soldier tasked with apprehending him. Garcilaso de la Vega described Aguirre's escape from Cuzco as "one of the most remarkable occurrences of the time in Peru, both because of the severity of the judge and the extraordinary pains he took and because of Aguirre's folly on the day of his deed which helped rather than hindered him."<sup>17</sup> From 1551-1552, Aguirre evaded capture by hiding in Nicaragua, but a lack of opportunities within the region eventually led him back to Peru. Within a year of returning, Aguirre is reported to have been involved in yet another revolt, this time fighting under the conquistador and encomendero Sebastián de Castilla, who was in revolt

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 1276

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 1278

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 1278

against the enforcement of the New Laws. Aguirre's fondness for violence and experience with murder resulted in Castilla assigning him the task of murdering Pedro de Hinojosa, whom the Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza had appointed as governor of the province of Charcas. On May 5, 1553, Aguirre and a Spaniard named Melchor Verdugo assassinated the governor in his residence.<sup>18</sup> Once again, Aguirre became a wanted man for the murder of a colonial official and evaded capture.

It is unknown where exactly Aguirre fled to, but he reappeared once again in Peru, enlisting in the royalist army raised to combat the revolt of Francisco Hernández Girón. He participated in the 1554 Battle of Chuiquina. In return for his service to the Crown, Aguirre earned a royal pardon as experienced soldiers were in demand during the period. As an experienced soldier, Aguirre had remained relatively lucky in combat, not suffering any significant injuries. However, at Chuquina, he suffered a harquebus wound to the right leg, leaving him with a noticeable limp for the rest of his life.

The Battle of Chuquina marked the end of Aguirre's service to the royalists as a soldier as well as the end of the conquistador revolts, which had plagued Peru since the 1530s. The year 1556 marked the arrival of a new viceroy, Don Andrés Hurtado de Mendoza, The Marqués de Cañete. Cañete soon set about pacifying any discontent by rewarding those deemed loyal to the royalist efforts with large encomiendas while exacting harsh punishment on rebels and those considered troublesome. While Aguirre had served the royalists in combat on several occasions, his participation in the revolts of Castilla and the Esquivel incident ruled out any chances of the now middle-aged Basque gaining any kind of rewards for his efforts. Furthermore, he had gained an ill reputation throughout the entirety of Peru as a dissident and troublemaker. The Ex-

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<sup>18</sup> Oviedo y Baños, *The Conquest and Settlement of Venezuela*, 158

Marañón Gonzalo de Zúñiga wrote of Aguirre, “He was so riotous and bad-tempered that he made a nuisance of himself in every town in Peru, from most of which he was banned. They know him by no other name than “Aguirre the Madman.”<sup>19</sup> As a result, the lame and aging Aguirre spent most of the 1550s as a vagrant, unable to remain in one location for too long. Like many of the second generation of hopeful conquistadors, Aguirre's time in America had not granted him a coveted encomienda nor a lucrative position within the colonial administration. As a Basque of noble status, his poor condition and ill luck likely furthered Aguirre's discontent with colonial authorities and the Spanish Crown.

In 1558, Viceroy Mendoza implemented the policy of La Descarga de la Tierra, or The Discharge of the Lands,<sup>20</sup> which aimed at ridding Peru of its many vagrants and failed conquistadors as well as to aid in the Spanish exploration of the lands east of Peru. In return for participating in one of these expeditions of exploration and conquest, its members were promised a share of any wealth discovered as well as a coveted encomienda. This policy was largely based upon the system of conquest and reward which was used during the conquests of the Aztecs and Incas, and as such would have appealed to any soldier or conquistador who had sailed to the Americas under the premise of obtaining vast wealth through conquest much like Cortés and Pizarro.

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<sup>19</sup> Jay, *Sins, Crimes, and Retribution in Early Latin America*, 74

<sup>20</sup> Balkan, *The Wrath of God*, 31

*Orsúa's Expedition and Aguirre's Cruise (1559-1561)*

The fateful expedition of Pedro de Orsúa and Lope de Aguirre is traditionally divided into three sections, much like acts in a play. The first focuses on the organization of the El Dorado expedition by Orsúa and concludes with his assassination. The second and shortest spans from the election of don Fernando de Guzmán as: “By the Grace of God, Prince of the Mainland and Peru and Governor of Chile”<sup>21</sup> and closes with his murder at the hands of Aguirre. The final and most descriptive section focuses on the seizure of command by 'the tyrant' and follows his path until his execution at Barquisimeto, in the Venezuelan interior. Like the many expeditions into the unexplored South American landscape which preceded it, that of Orsúa was focused on discovering the mythical kingdoms of El Dorado and Omagua, both purported to contain vast riches in gold and silver, which would make the treasures of the Incas and Aztecs appear meager in comparison.

As early as Columbus's first voyage to the Caribbean in 1492, the explorer recorded indigenous reports of large gold mines and empires of great wealth. On October 19, only one week after making initial landfall in the Bahamas, Columbus wrote of a “king, who according to the signs they (the Taíno peoples) make, rules over all the neighboring islands, goes about clothed, and wears much gold on his person.”<sup>22</sup> This was the first of many reports of what would later become known as the legend of El Dorado or The Golden Man, which persisted throughout America during the entirety of European conquest and colonization. By the mid-sixteenth century, the myth of El Dorado had morphed into a tale of an indigenous king, who would anoint himself in gold dust during a ritualistic ceremony (on Lake Guatavita, in one version of the tale)

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<sup>21</sup> Pastor Bodmer, *Armatures of Conquest*, 182 (trans. by author)

<sup>22</sup> Columbus, *Journal of the First Voyage of Columbus*, 52 (trans. by author)

and upon reaching the center of the lake would bathe in the waters, washing off the gold dust. Furthermore, “The gilded Indian then [threw] out all the pile of gold into the middle of the lake, and the chiefs who had accompanied him did the same on their own accounts.”<sup>23</sup> The many European expeditions of the sixteenth century in search of El Dorado, including those led by Nicolaus Federmann, Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, and Gonzalo Pizarro, failed to discover such a place. However, the Europeans' desire for riches akin to those of the Aztecs and Incas only stoked further desire to search for El Dorado. By the time of the organization of the Orsúa expedition at the end of the 1550s, the myth had spawned belief in a fabulous civilization whose riches were incomparable to any yet discovered.

Even the Marquis of Cañete was swept up in the El Dorado fever, as both the accounts of Orellana's famed cruise down the Amazon of 1541 and indigenous reports of a great civilization located somewhere in the Amazon Basin proved to be an enticing investment. The viceroy appointed a young nobleman named Pedro de Orsúa to assemble and command an expedition in search of the fabulous (and mythical) wealth of El Dorado and Omagua. While similar expeditions of discovery had occurred throughout America during the sixteenth century, that of Orsúa would be the largest such expedition assembled to date, consisting of 370 soldiers armed with harquebuses and machetes, 500 horses, and roughly 600 native Andean porters.<sup>24</sup> This incredibly ambitious expedition and its potentially fabulous golden rewards attracted the attention of some of Peru's most notorious and ill-reputed individuals, including Lope de Aguirre.

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<sup>23</sup> Freyle, *El Carnero*, 64

<sup>24</sup> Balkan, *The Wrath of God*, 35

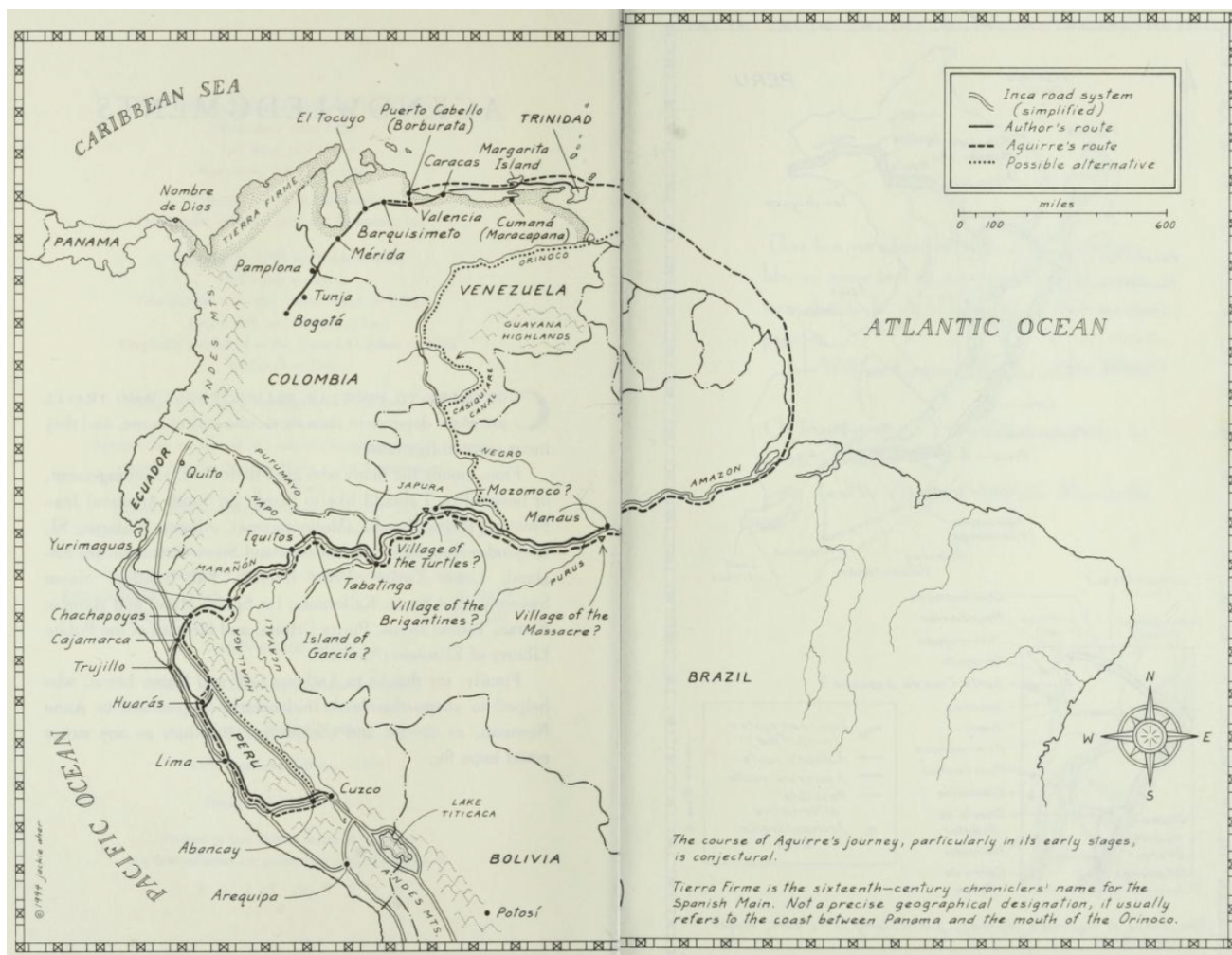


Figure 1.2. Map of the proposed route of the 1559-1561 Expedition of Pedro de Orsúa and rebellion of Lope de Aguirre. Illustration by Stephen Minta. In Stephen Minta, *Aguirre, The Re-Creation of A Sixteenth-Century Journey Across South America*, ii. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993

Orsúa spent much of 1559 and early 1560 recruiting men and obtaining provisions and funds from investors across Peru. As evidenced by several sources concerning the expedition, Orsúa's preparations failed in several key aspects. First, the expedition was plagued by a lack of proper funding to provision such a large company. Growing increasingly desperate to secure funds, Orsúa allegedly forced the priest of Santa Cruz, Pedro Portillo, to "lend" him all his ready money, some four or five thousand pesos, according to the expedition account provided by Pedro

Simón. Ex-Marañon Gonzalo de Zúñiga reported that despite being promised a hefty sum of 1,000,000 pesos by financiers, “he started his voyage with insufficient funds; there was much big talk which annoyed many, and in fact in the end he had to make do with a total of 200,000 pesos.”<sup>25</sup> While this sum may seem adequate to fund an expedition, it is worth noting the difference in funding between Orsúa and Gonzalo Pizarro only nineteen years prior. According to colonial records concerning the annual income of Gonzalo Pizarro's repartimientos, “just one of [his] repartimientos, located in Charcas, was valued at about 100,000 pesos per year.”<sup>26</sup> In addition, Gonzalo Pizarro held many other highly lucrative repartimientos, so he had likely over 500,000 pesos at his disposal for his fateful 1541 expedition, and yet this earlier expedition also ended in disaster.

Another issue faced by Orsúa was that an expedition of such size and ambition required a large company of men who had knowledge and experience with conquering native peoples. By this period, most of Peru's population of experienced soldiers had been involved in the many encomendero revolts of the 1540s and 1550s and were described as “disorderly rabble”<sup>27</sup> by contemporary chroniclers. This issue is best expressed by a letter written to Orsúa by his friend, Pedro de Linasco, who warned the young commander that “many of his soldiers were turbulent and mutinous, and that they might be troublesome to him, and might even kill him.”<sup>28</sup> Linasco also identified several members of Orsúa's ranks who were especially notorious by name, including Lope de Aguirre, who had gained a murderous reputation throughout Peru by 1560. Finally, Orsúa was expressly warned not to bring his mistress, Doña Inez de Atienza, on his expedition as it might stir discontent and jealousy among his men. Doña Inez de Atienza, a

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<sup>25</sup> Jay, *Sins, Crimes, and Retributions*, 18

<sup>26</sup> Varón Gabai and Jacobs, *Peruvian Wealth and Spanish Investments*, 661

<sup>27</sup> Bandelier, *The Gilded Man*, 65

<sup>28</sup> Simón, *Noticias Historiales*, 12

young mestizo woman, had become Orsúa's mistress during his fundraising campaign of 1559 and was reputed to be the most beautiful woman in all of Peru. As reported by Simón, Linasco's warnings fell on deaf ears as Orsúa neglected this advice, departing Trujillo in early 1560 en route to Moyobamba, with both Aguirre and Atienza in tow.

Under Orsúa, Aguirre traversed the Andes Mountain range, arriving in the Spanish outpost of Santa Cruz on July 1, 1560. For the next several months, the expedition constructed a total of “eleven barges, two brigantines, and some other craft capable of carrying 40 horses and 200 persons.”<sup>29</sup> The small settlement of Santa Cruz, located along the Huallaga and Saposoa Rivers, would play host to the first of many brutal murders which would unfold over the next year. Prior to Orsúa's arrival in Santa Cruz, he appointed a Spaniard, Pedro Ramiro, as captain-commandant, of the encamped company. According to Simón, jealousy and contempt drove two expedition members, Francisco Díaz de Arles and Diego de Frías, to strangle and behead Ramiro. For their actions, both Arles and Frías were promptly arrested by Orsúa and executed by beheading. The blatant murder of Ramiro caused anxiety and suspicion among the expedition's command, as Arles and Frias were only a few of many violent and troublesome individuals among Orsúa's ranks.

Furthermore, the lack of proper supplies and delays began to fuel talk of mutiny among the soldiers. Likely wanting to split up his forces and thus dissipate the possibility of mutiny, Orsúa sent two expeditions ahead of the main force to establish a camp downriver in early October. A group of 100 men under the command of Captain Juan de Vargas were sent by land to establish a camp at the convergence of the Ucayali and Marañon Rivers. Additionally, a company of thirty soldiers was sent via river under Garcia del Arçe to meet Vargas' force upon

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<sup>29</sup> Jay, *Sins, Crimes, and Retributions*, 21



its arrival. Pedro Simón called this place Caperuzos and noted it being some “twenty leagues downriver where the vessels were being built.”<sup>30</sup> The main body of the expedition departed Santa Cruz soon after.

As reported by the account of the expedition by Robert Southey, upon the arrival of the entirety of the force at Ucayali, several of the brigantines constructed at Santa Cruz were “rotten, so utterly unserviceable was the timber of that country; and they had scarcely renewed their voyage before it was found necessary to abandon them and distribute the crew and cargo among the other boats.”<sup>31</sup> Forced to move both the men and provisions to the few remaining brigantines and, flotilla of canoes, many of the cattle, horses, goats, and provisions were abandoned, causing a loss of morale among the men and further fueling the talk of mutiny among them. This abandonment of most resources and animals forced the expedition to rely upon raiding native villages along the river for provisions, though this method failed to adequately supply an expedition of such size. Despite the cramped conditions of the expedition, Orsúa reserved one of the two brigantines for Doña Inés, manned by six Spaniards as oarsmen. Continuing down the river, Francisco Vásquez reported that the company had found several Indian settlements where they succeeded in discovering some supplies of maize and turtles, and they remained for 25 days to rest and reprovision, at a location referred to as the Village of the Turtles. The failure to find any evidence of the rich provinces of El Dorado or Omagua and dwindling supplies created a sense of despair among the men, and “this misery increased their weakness every day, and had it lasted a little longer they must have all died. The whole blame was laid on the governor, for his

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<sup>30</sup> Simón, *Noticias Historiales*, 14

<sup>31</sup> Southey, *The Expedition of Orsúa*, 25

improvidence.”<sup>32</sup> Fearing possible mutiny, Orsúa's closest supporters advised him to assign a guard to protect the governor. Yet, this pleading fell once again on deaf ears.

At this point in the expedition, Lope de Aguirre re-enters the accounts of the expedition as one of the principal conspirers against Orsúa. According to Simón's account, Aguirre “began to spread a rumor that all had been deceived, for that they had journeyed more than seventy leagues, and had neither met with the rich provinces for which they were in search, nor even found any sign by which they might ascertain in which direction to search. They decided that it would be best to return up the river to Peru, as there appeared to be no hope of success.”<sup>33</sup>

While Aguirre is commonly named as the principal conspirator against Orsúa, his sentiment was likely shared by many as Orsúa's preferential treatment of Doña Inés, the dwindling food supplies, and failure to find any signs of El Dorado greatly affected the company's morale. Upon departing the Village of the Turtles, the expedition sailed down the river for two more days, during which Aguirre recruited men to assist him in his planned mutiny.

On the night of January 1, 1560, the expedition set up camp at the junction of The Putumayo and Amazon Rivers. At this point, Aguirre's planned mutiny, which had enlisted at least twelve men by now, was set into motion. The mutineers had recruited Orsúa's second-in-command, don Fernando de Guzman, to succeed the governor upon his death. Pedro Simón's narrative provides the best account of the murder of Orsúa and the seizure of command by Aguirre. In the early hours of the night, a group consisting of Aguirre, Alonzo de Montoya, and Cristobal Hernández de Cháves departed the lodgings of Guzman and entered the dwellings of Orsúa, finding the governor resting in a hammock. Approaching Orsúa, the mutineers “made a

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<sup>32</sup> Simón, *Noticias Historiales*, 32

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 36

murderous onset on Orsúa, so that he soon fell dead, without being able to say more than, “Confessio, confessio, miserere mei Deus.” The deed being done, they sallied out of the hut, and one of them, with a loud voice, shouted, “Liberty, Liberty! Long live the King, The Tyrant is dead.”<sup>34</sup> The act having succeeded, the mutineers proceeded to spend the remainder of the night slaying any Spaniard whom they suspected of supporting Orsúa, burying the dead in a mass grave along the river.

The following morning, the mutineers, having named Guzmán governor and Lope de Aguirre as *maestre de campo*, signed a document which attempted to justify their slaying of Orsúa as the only means by which the expedition could survive certain death. Juan Alonso de la Bandera reported that Aguirre proudly exclaimed, “killing Orsúa was in the best service of the King and he who says that I am a traitor in this matter, I tell him that he lies, and I will make good my words, and I now dare him to martial combat.”<sup>35</sup> It is impossible to know for a certainty whether the men of the expedition willingly signed their names to the document or were forced to under Aguirre's threat of death as the document mysteriously disappeared, likely destroyed by the survivors of the expedition to exculpate them from accusations of actively rebelling against the Crown. At only thirty-five years of age, Pedro de Orsúa had met a violent and bloody demise after only a few months in command. Many of the Ex-Marañones chroniclers tend to praise Orsúa as an amiable nobleman whose demise was primarily the result of Aguirre's thirst for blood. However, the colonial chronicler Juan Rodríguez Freyle in his work, *El Carnero*, claimed that Orsúa's assassination was likely the result of his inability to punish his men and his preferential treatment of Doña Inés.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 38

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 39

<sup>36</sup> Freyle, *El Carnero*, 99

Aguirre had no intention of continuing the expedition's original goal of discovering El Dorado or Omagua. Instead, he wished to return to Peru and attempt to lead a rebellion against the colonial government, much like the many conquistadors-turned-rebels whom he had served under prior to the expedition. However, this plan was not shared by Guzmán, who, according to Vásquez's chronicle, began to regret his act of treason against the Crown or at least against Ursúa and decided that the expedition should continue searching for El Dorado in the hopes that its discovery would help to absolve his role in Orsúa's murder. As the expedition sailed down the Amazon, Guzmán and his closest followers discussed their intentions over the next several weeks and decided that the only means by which they could succeed was to kill the mutineers who remained determined to return to Peru, including Aguirre.

While Guzmán secretly conspired behind Aguirre's back, Aguirre used his role as second-in-command to embark upon a series of executions against those he considered untrustworthy. This first man to die was García de Arçe, a friend of Orsúa, whom Aguirre ordered garroted. Over the next several weeks, more than half a dozen men were executed at the order of Aguirre, and sentences were carried out by his most loyal followers. The most appalling of these murders was of Doña Inez de Atienza, who had become the mistress of Lorenzo Salduendo after Orsúa's murder. According to Simón's narrative, Aguirre had grown jealous of Salduendo's relationship with Doña Inez and, in a fit of rage, killed Salduendo in cold blood: "The cruel beast Aguirre, now bathed in the blood of Salduendo, longed to shed that of Doña Inez."<sup>37</sup> Aguirre ordered Anton Llamoso and Francisco Salduendo (it is unclear whether Francisco Salduendo has any familial connections to Lorenzo Salduendo) to carry out the murder. The two men reportedly found Inez hiding in some undergrowth and "ran her through with their spears, swords, and

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 67

finished her off with their daggers. They enjoyed the slaughter and prolonged her agony. Surely, very few men could have taken such pleasure in butchering such a beautiful woman!”<sup>38</sup> Despite this atrocious act, Guzmán remained hesitant to execute Aguirre, despite the pleas of his closest advisors. However, Guzmán did demote Aguirre from his position as Maestro de Campo, though he later reinstated him as Maestro de Caballeros, an ironic title given that all of the expedition's horses had either been killed for food or died from starvation by this point.

According to Simón, Gonzalo de Fuentes, Guzmán's captain of the guard, and Alonso de Villena, perhaps fearing Aguirre's wrath after the murders of Salduendo and Ines, informed Aguirre of Guzmán's conspiracy to assassinate him and to abandon the plan to sail to Peru. Incensed by these accusations, Aguirre purportedly gathered his closest supporters and set off on a spree of executions of those closest to Guzmán, killing some six Spaniards, including a priest by the name of Padre Alonso Henao. Under Aguirre, his supporters proceeded to Guzmán's quarters. Martin Pérez and Juan de Aguirre, having found Guzman resting, “fired their arquebuses at him. They afterwards attacked him with their swords, and then he fell dead at their feet.”<sup>39</sup> After only a few weeks, the young nobleman and self-proclaimed Prince of Peru lay dead with Aguirre officially seizing command of the expedition and continuing his plans to return to Peru.

At this point in the expedition, Aguirre penned his most famous surviving letter. Addressed to King Philip II of Spain, he renounced his allegiance to Philip and declared his intention to return to Peru and overthrow the colonial government. As recorded by Francisco Vásquez, the two-page document summarizes Aguirre's three decades of mistreatment in the

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<sup>38</sup> Jay, *Sins, Crimes, and Retribution in Early Latin America*, 40

<sup>39</sup> Simón, *Noticias Historiales*, 93

Americas. It outlines the many sources of corruption throughout the colonial government, which Aguirre believed was the root of his many misfortunes.

“I demand of you, King, that you do justice and right by the good vassals you have in this land, even though I and my companions (whose names I will give later), unable to suffer further the cruelties of your judges, Viceroy, and governors, have resolved to obey you no longer. Denaturalizing ourselves from our land, Spain, we make the most cruel war against you that our power can sustain and endure. Believe, King and lord, we have done this because we can no longer tolerate the great oppression and unjust punishments of your ministers who, to make places for their sons and dependents have usurped and robbed our fame, life, and honor. It is a pity, King, the bad treatment you have given us.”<sup>40</sup>

Having now seized command of the expedition, Aguirre made preparations to return to Peru and during the two days following Guzman's death, they sailed some 300 leagues down the Rio Negro, intending to sail to the mouth of the Orinoco and out to the Atlantic. Aguirre's haste to reach Peru was likely out of fear that like, Orsúa and Guzman, he might face an attempted mutiny against him. This is evidenced by the account of Zuñiga, who reported that “since the murder of Don Fernando, Aguirre had never set foot on land, not daring to do so and not until we reached the Island of Margarita. He said his was one of the most difficult enterprises ever undertaken in Peru. He continued to be heavily protected at all times, with guns loaded. He always wore a doublet.”<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, he also issued a proclamation that any man who was found to brandish his weapon, gather in groups, or venture away from the main force without explicit permission,

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<sup>40</sup> Holloway, *Letter to King Philip* (trans. by Holloway)

<sup>41</sup> Jay, *Sins, Crimes, and Retribution in Early Latin America*, 43

would face a swift execution. For two months, the expedition sailed down the Rio Negro and Orinoco to its mouth, raiding native settlements for provisions and preparing the brigantines for the rough waters of the Atlantic. The many chroniclers of the expedition reported that Aguirre executed at least eight men for varying reasons. In one particularly gruesome case, Aguirre ordered his most loyal men to execute the Comendador Juan de Guevara on the basis that his prior role in the assassination of Guzman and Orsúa made him an untrustworthy character. According to Zuñiga's testimony, "One of the general's men, on the orders of Aguirre, twice or three times thrust his dagger into his (Guevara's) belly. He then cut off his head and cast it into the river."<sup>42</sup> Many other members of the expedition met similar fates, often accused of plotting against Aguirre's command.

Prior to reaching the mouth of the Orinoco, Aguirre was reported to have ordered that the Peruvian Indians that had initially been used as porters by Orsúa be abandoned, believing that such a large group was a burden on the dwindling supplies of the expedition. Given that the indigenous porters originally came from the Peruvian Andes, it is likely that they quickly perished from attacks by Amazonian Indians, starvation, or sickness. This act can be dually viewed as one which exemplifies Aguirre's cruelty and as one out of desperation as the expedition was plagued by low food stores for much of its duration. Aguirre arrived at the mouth of the Orinoco on July 1, 1561, close to one year after he first departed Peru. At this point, Aguirre outlined his plan to sail the remaining brigantines to Margarita Island, where the expedition would reprovision itself and then make its way to the Venezuelan mainland, where they would march to the Isthmus of Panama and on to Peru, defeating any colonial forces in its way. Aguirre seized all the expedition's navigation equipment and charts to prevent any men

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 45

from escaping and alerting colonial forces. Sailing past the Island of Trinidad, Aguirre arrived at Margarita Island in seventeen days on July 20, 1561. The beach on which Aguirre first landed is still referred to as the Tyrant's port, some four centuries after Aguirre's death. Prior to disembarking, Aguirre killed two more of his men, Gonzalo Guiral de Fuentes and Diego de Alecruz, for suspected disloyalty and for having supported Guzmán prior to his death. These two men were stabbed to death so as not to alert Margarita's residents to the brutal action. The following morning, Aguirre disembarked and greeted the gathering residents of Margarita who had spotted the brigantines as they landed the earlier day. According to the account of Pedro Simón, Aguirre hid healthiest and strongest men below deck to present his force as starving explorers, much as Gonzalo Pizarro had done upon his return from his failed El Dorado expedition a decade earlier. As an act of goodwill, Aguirre presented several of the most prominent residents with gilded cups and jewelry that had initially belonged to Doña Inés. Upon the arrival of the Island's governor, Juan Gómez de Villandrando, Aguirre pleaded with him to allow his men to disembark the brigantines with their arms, a request which the governor foolishly allowed.

Returning to his men who were still aboard the brigantines with their harquebuses loaded and swords sharpened, Aguirre ordered his men to spring out of the boats and surround the governor and his entourage. Taken by surprise, the governor's guards showed little resistance and were soon prisoners of Aguirre. Approaching the governor while clad in armor and with his sword drawn, Aguirre began to address the governor concerning his actions:

“Señor, in my dealings with you I do not intend to conceal anything from your lordship.

For you should know the full truth. We departed from the Kingdom of Peru with the governor Pedro de Orsúa to conquer the Amazon and the land of El Dorado. We have



killed the governor because it suited us no longer to work for the King, nor to respect or to receive awards as his servants. He failed to send judges to deal with our grievances. For this reason, I have assumed jurisdiction and the robes and trimmings of a judge in order to castigate them for their misdeeds they have committed against all of us. It is for this and other reasons that we have rebelled against his majesty. I know what awards those who serve the king merit; I defy the judges he sends; they carry no weight with us. We are totally unrepentant, and we shall be so even when they take our lives for having rebelled against the King. Fortunately, men like ourselves are worthier and more dignified without titles.”<sup>43</sup>

Having now seized control of the island, Aguirre set about collecting any residents of Margarita whom he suspected might oppose his occupation, imprisoning them in the fort in the town of Porlamar alongside the governor. He then ordered his second-in-command, Martin Perez, to seize any weapons or valuables found in possession of the islanders. Meanwhile, the chroniclers reported that Aguirre broke into the town's treasury, making sure to steal the king's fifth, which consisted of several chests of bullion and cloth worth 20,000 pesos,<sup>44</sup> according to Zuñiga. He then set about securing a more seaworthy vessel to transport the company of rebels to the Isthmus of Panama, learning that in Maracapaná, a Dominican Provincial, Father Francisco Montesinos had a large and well-armed vessel in his possession. Aguirre dispatched Pedro de Monguía and eight men to sail the roughly 45-mile journey and seize the ship. However, upon reaching the Provincial, Monguía and the other men, now free from Aguirre's supervision, quickly surrendered and informed him of Aguirre's plan. The Provincial quickly prepared his ship to sail to Margarita Island to inspect the threat posed by Aguirre and then onto modern-day

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<sup>43</sup> Balkan, *Wrath of God*, 108 (trans. by author)

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 111

Borburata to inform the colonial officials of Aguirre's presence on the Island. The same day that Monguía defected, four other men under Aguirre, Francisco Vásquez, Gonzalo de Zuñiga, Juan de Villatoro, and Luis Sanchez del Castillo, attempted to flee into the jungles of Margarita in the dark of night. Both Zuñiga and Vásquez succeeded in evading capture, later providing accounts of Aguirre's tyranny, while the latter two were quickly recaptured and brutally executed in the town's square.

By this point, one week had passed since Monguía's party had left for Maracapaná, and Aguirre saw no sign of their return. Likely fearing that they had defected (as they had) Aguirre gathered the residents of Porlamar and addressed them:

“If my men have been imprisoned you will suffer every species of cruelty imaginable! No person shall be exempt- no man, no woman, no baby at the breast! The public places and streets will be washed with blood! The watercourses of Margarita City shall run with blood! No house will stand, a thousand monks will be sacrificed with the most painful deaths! And hear this, mark me on this: If Father Montesinos comes into my hands, I shall flay him alive and make a drum of his skull!”<sup>45</sup>

The following day, Aguirre finally spotted the father's ship sailing over the horizon, unaware that Montesinos was captaining the vessel and had already alerted colonial authorities along the coast of Venezuela about Aguirre's occupation of the Island. During his preparations to sail to Margarita, Montesinos sent news of Aguirre's rebellion to the Venezuelan Mainland, which quickly spread across the region. Furthermore, he sent a letter to Aguirre ordering he cease his rebellion as well as informing the Basque rebel of his earlier reporting of the current situations to colonial officials. When informed of this, Aguirre went into a fit of rage and set about fulfilling

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 125 (trans. by author)

his earlier promise to the residents of Porlamar. He commanded his two most loyal men, Anton Llamoso and Martin Perez to go to the fort and execute the leading residents of Margarita immediately. Both Llamoso and Perez were condemned by the subsequent chroniclers as having enjoyed the act of killing as much as, if not more than, Aguirre and readily accepted the task. Entering the fort, the two men gathered the governor, the judge Manuel Rodriguez, the regidor Caceres, alguazil mayor Cosme de Leon, and a leading Margaritan Juan Rodrigues into the fort's central plaza and proceeded to strangle each one of them, ignoring their pleas for mercy. Following the brutal act, Aguirre brought the town's residents and his men to the fort to view the corpses, perhaps in a show of his authority and willingness to execute any who opposed him.

Aguirre then ordered the bulk of his force to assemble in the town square to meet Montesinos if he decided to attack Porlamar. During this frenzy, one of the most horrific and brutal incidents of the entire voyage occurred. While Aguirre was assembling his forces, he was informed that his second-in-command Martín Pérez remained in his quarters, gorging himself on the wine and provisions stockpiled for use by the expedition. Enraged by this, Aguirre ordered Perez to the fort intending to execute him for this act. Upon Perez's entrance to Aguirre's quarters, he was shot at point-blank range and swarmed by several men who stabbed the wounded man repeatedly until he laid dead at Aguirre's feet. Up until this point, Perez had been one of Aguirre's most loyal soldiers and had committed numerous atrocities under the command of Aguirre. The men who witnessed this act realized that Aguirre showed no loyalty to anyone and would readily kill any man whom he felt betrayed him or ignored his orders. According to Pedro Simón, Anton Llamoso, who was one of Aguirre's most loyal men, hurried to Perez's body and, in a sign of loyalty, “threw himself upon it, shouting, “Curse this traitor, who wished to commit so great a crime! I will drink his blood!” and, putting his mouth over the wound in

Perez's head, with more than a demonic rage, he began to suck the blood and brains that issued from the wounds, and swallowed what he sucked, as if he were a famished dog."<sup>46</sup> Satisfied by Llamoso's show of loyalty, Aguirre smiled and continued his preparations to defend the town from Montesinos' forces.

At this point in the narrative, it is worth taking a step back to analyze the above-mentioned scene. The Ex-Marañones, Francisco Vásquez and Pedrarias de Alместo initially recounted this gory incident in their accounts, and it was subsequently recounted by Fray Pedro Simón in his own account, some six decades later. That being said, despite the incident being reported by primary witnesses, such a claim should be taken with a degree of skepticism and not be fully accepted at face value. As the next chapter will analyze, the accounts of the Ex-Marañones were not always completely faithful to the historical events and there is a possibility that such an atrocious event could have been the product of their own imaginations.

The following morning, Aguirre learned that the father's ship was anchored two miles offshore, and he wrote a letter addressed to Montesinos. This letter, much like the one written to King Philip, declared Aguirre's intentions and offered Montesinos the position of head of the church in Peru if he agreed to assist Aguirre in his conquest. Upon receiving Aguirre's letter, Montesinos wrote one of his own before departing for the Venezuelan mainland to further gather a force to combat Aguirre. In the letter, Montesinos ordered Aguirre to desist in his actions and turn himself into colonial authorities, an order which Aguirre had no intention of following. At this point, Aguirre decided to depart Margarita for the mainland to continue his conquest. However, prior to departing, Aguirre embarked on a purge of any soldier of Margaritan whom he thought may betray him or defect to the Royalist side. In two days, Aguirre executed seven of his

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<sup>46</sup> Simón, *Noticias Historiales*, 150

men and four Margaritan civilians, two of whom were priests. Finally, after forty days, Aguirre and the remainder of his force departed Margarita for the Venezuelan mainland on August 31. It has been estimated that of the 200 men whom Aguirre landed on Margarite, only 150 remained when they departed due to desertions and executions.<sup>47</sup>

Aguirre's original plan had been to sail to the Isthmus of Panama, cross to the Pacific and sail to Peru. However, Aguirre likely knew that the Provincial had alerted colonial authorities of his plans, so he decided to take an overland route of some 1,300 miles to Peru. Aguirre's forces arrived at the Venezuelan town of Borburata on September 5. He immediately set about destroying several ships in the harbor and looting wealth or goods from the town. Having learned of Aguirre's arrival, the residents of Borburata had fled to nearby Tocuyo to alert its governor, Pablo Collado. Meanwhile, Aguirre and his men pillaged and destroyed the town of Borburata, showing no interest in gaining the sympathy of the few remaining residents. After several days, the force of rebels moved west to the town of Valencia, some fifty miles inland. Like their actions in Borburata, Aguirre and his men sacked the town without remorse before continuing onwards towards Barquisimeto.

During this march, many men were executed by Aguirre, and several others defected, perhaps hoping to escape a similar fate. To avoid further desertions, Aguirre ordered his men to sleep in a single dwelling at night and not have conversations amongst themselves in private. According to Pedro Simón, while on the march to Barquisimeto, Aguirre had consulted his officers about ordering the execution of some 40 men whom he suspected might desert him upon the arrival of the royalist forces. However, his officers dissuaded him from this act since murdering so many men may cause the rest to either desert or attempt a mutiny against him. This

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<sup>47</sup> Balkan, *Wrath of God*, 117

was the first instance of Aguirre's closest advisors refusing to obey one of his commands, signaling that many of them were likely losing hope in the ultimate success of Aguirre's plan to conquer Peru.

By mid-October 1561, Aguirre and his forces reached the outskirts of Barquisimeto and had their first encounter with the royalist forces under Captain Diego de Paredes, who numbered roughly eighty men. While marching on a narrow path cut into the mountain, both the rebel and royalist forces unexpectedly met. Both forces quickly retreated as neither was prepared for combat. According to Simón, the royalist forces retreated in such an urgent manner that many of the soldiers dropped their helmets and lances in haste, retreating to the town. Now aware of the proximity of Aguirre's forces, Captain Paredes informed Governor Collado, who remained in Tocuyo, about the situation. To quell the rebellion without any bloodshed, Collado ordered the royalist forces to retreat from Barquisimeto but leave several letters of pardon for Aguirre and his men to find. On October 22,<sup>48</sup> Aguirre entered the town of Barquisimeto, finding it devoid of its residents or any royalist opposition. Upon discovering the large number of letters of pardon, Aguirre ordered that any man found to have one would face a quick execution. He commanded that most of the town's buildings be set aflame, and his remaining men to take up positions in the small fort in the square. For the first time since killing Orsúa, Aguirre was on the defensive and faced increasingly overwhelming force, both from increasing desertions from within his ranks and from Collado's Royalist force which grew in numbers each day.

At this point, Aguirre likely feared a similar fate to that of Gonzalo Pizarro, whom he had fought against thirteen years prior at The Battle of Jaquijahuana. On the eve of the battle, the royalist's offering of pardons to those who willingly defected from Pizarro's side resulted in

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<sup>48</sup> Lowry, *Lope de Aguirre, The Wanderer*, 70

much of his force defecting en masse. As a result, Gonzalo Pizarro's vastly outnumbered force was quickly defeated, either killed or captured. Pizarro himself was captured and summarily beheaded the following day and dubbed a traitor. Having been a direct witness to this and facing a similar circumstance, Aguirre likely knew that surrender would not be an option as his crimes now far outnumbered those of Pizarro. If he had any hope of succeeding or even living, Aguirre needed to succeed in defeating the royalist forces who now surrounded the town.

Over the next several days, several more of Aguirre's men deserted, and the remaining rebels engaged in several minor skirmishes with royalist soldiers. By this point, Aguirre had likely lost hope of his ultimate plan succeeding, but much like his two-year quest to murder Esquivel, Aguirre showed no signs of going down without a fight. On October 26, Aguirre organized a final assault against the royalist forces, now under the command of Paredes. Organizing his sixty harquebusiers in a line, Aguirre ordered his men to advance on the royalist camp and overrun their position. When ordered to begin the assault, none of the Marañones fired a single shot or followed Aguirre's commands. Instead, several men calmly defected to the royalist camp with letters of pardon in hand, with one man reportedly even exclaiming “Long Live the King! Long Live the King!”<sup>49</sup> as he defected. During his reign as the leader of the Marañones, Aguirre relied upon two means to assert his authority: through fear and intimidation and his constant reminder to his men that their crimes of mutiny and murder were unpardonable. The earlier refusal of his captains to continue executing men whom Aguirre feared might betray him had significantly weakened his authority, and now the notion of a full pardon was likely an irresistible offer to many of Marañones.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 73 (trans. by author)

By the morning of October 27, most of Aguirre's force had willingly defected, with only Anton Llamoso, Elvira, and her indigenous duenna remaining in the rebel camp. Several twentieth century authors on Aguirre, such as Southey and Lowey, have argued that Llamoso's decision was the result of loyalty. Though, given that Llamoso was reportedly “the worst butcher in his (Aguirre's) service,”<sup>50</sup> the decision to remain was likely due to the fact he would have been quickly murdered or executed for his complicity in Aguirre's terror. With his force gone and facing imminent defeat, Aguirre walked to his daughter's quarter to commit an act which Simón would later refer to as one which would “crown all his cruel acts with this most bloody and unnatural one.”<sup>51</sup> Entering his daughter's quarters, dagger in hand, Aguirre addressed his daughter, perhaps the only person to whom he ever showed love and affection.

“My daughter, my love. I thought I should see you married and a great lady, but my sins and great pride have willed it otherwise. Commend yourself to God, my daughter, and make peace with him ... For I am about to kill you that you may not be pointed at with scorn, nor be in the power of anyone who may call you the daughter of a traitor. For it is not right that you should remain in this world for some villain to enjoy your beauty and loveliness, my love, you will not become a mere mattress for the unworthy.”<sup>52</sup>

With those words, Elvira reportedly pleaded with her father to spare her life. Despite her pleas, Aguirre approached his daughter and stabbed her in the chest with a dagger.

Having killed his daughter, Aguirre set her body down as the royalist forces under Paredes entered the building. With royalist soldiers pointing their arquebuses at him, Aguirre reportedly slapped them away and addressed Paredes directly, asking that he be given a fair trial

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<sup>50</sup> Jay, *Sins, Crimes, and Retribution in Early Latin America*, 53

<sup>51</sup> Simón, *Noticias Historiales*, 165

<sup>52</sup> Lewis, *Miraculous Lie*, 36 (trans. by author)



as was the right of Spanish nobility, despite his prior foreswearing of his nobility and privileges. By this point, several of the Marañones who had earlier accepted the royal pardon gathered and shouted for Paredes to ignore Aguirre's request and kill him. This outcry to kill Aguirre by his former men was likely intended to prevent him from further implicating any of them in the many crimes committed during the expedition. Perhaps, overwhelmed by the outcries for death, Paredes condemned Aguirre to face a sudden execution. Two of his former men, Custodio Hernández and Cristóbal Galindo, entered the building and stripped Aguirre of his armor and chainmail. Despite his imminent death, Aguirre remained standing, providing no further pleas for mercy and accepting his fate. Both Galindo and Hernandez fired at point-blank range, hitting Aguirre in the chest, killing him. Nearly one year after he had first led the mutiny against Orsúa and seized command, Aguirre was killed in a seemingly quick manner given the severity of his many crimes and actions.

Immediately following his death, Paredes ordered that Aguirre's head and hands be cut off and sent to each corner of Spain's American colonies as a warning to any other would-be rebels. Aguirre's head was placed in a metal cage in the middle of Tocuyo's town square and purportedly remained there for several decades, with Pedro Simón noting its ominous presence in the 1600s. With Aguirre now dead, his hopes of conquering Peru became nothing but a failed dream. Like the many rebels who he had both fought for and against, he would be forever dubbed a tyrant and madman by the Crown. As for the Marañones who had accepted Paredes' pardons, their subsequent *relaciones* of their participation in the 1560-61 expedition would lay the framework for Aguirre's legacy which would remain persistent for four centuries following his untimely demise in Barquisimeto. The Basque rebel's legacy would haunt the South

American continent for many centuries, and he would be transformed by each subsequent generation into a villain, legendary figure, revolutionary, literary icon, and antihero.

## **Chapter 2: Aguirre the Tyrant and Madman (1561-1563)**

With Aguirre's bloody demise on the fields of Barquisimeto, in western Venezuela, his revolutionary vision of overthrowing the Spanish colonial government came to an end. However, the notoriety of his actions in life ensured that his legacy would live on long after his death. According to the account of Francisco Vásquez:

“for he (Aguirre) had often said that, if he could not return to Peru and lay it waste, and kill all those who lived there, then at least the fame of all the things he had done, and all his cruelties would remain in the memory of man forever.”<sup>53</sup>

Regardless of whether Aguirre made this statement, or it was the fictitious creation of Vásquez himself, it shows an awareness that Aguirre's actions would not simply be forgotten. In the roughly two decades following Aguirre's rebellion, a large body of writing concerning the failed-conquistador-turned-rebel was composed by those directly involved in the rebellion. This chapter analyzes the writings produced by the first generation of chroniclers, the Ex-Marañones, who witnessed his rebellion firsthand. In doing so, I analyze the circumstances under which their interest in writing about Aguirre arose and specifically how and why they portrayed him in the manner they did. In writing on Aguirre, these authors unanimously depicted Aguirre as a tyrannical madman, stripped of any redeeming attributes. This chapter will show that this iteration of Aguirre was created to serve the specific purpose of defending each authors' own self-interests. Thus, their visions of Aguirre can be considered as semi-fictionalized.

The campaigns of suppression and punishment help explain why these authors had an interest in writing against Aguirre and his rebels following his death. At this point, it is important

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<sup>53</sup> Minta, *Aguirre, The Recreation of a Sixteenth Century Journey*, 220 (trans. by author)

to look at how Spanish colonial authorities treated Aguirre's legacy following his death and their treatment of the Ex-Marañones who dispersed across New Granada following the rebellion. With Aguirre's death, Pablo Collado, the Governor and Captain General of Venezuela, ordered that his body be quartered and that his head and each of his limbs be spread around Venezuela to serve as a reminder of what would happen to those who rebelled against the king. According to the account of Pedro Simón, Aguirre's head was presented to the town of Tocuyo, where it remained, in the town center, for at least four decades. His left hand was given to de la Peña to be presented to Valencia, and his right was given to Bravo for the town of Mérida. However, these grisly tokens were thrown to hungry dogs soon after due to decomposition of the grisly tokens.

On December 17, 1561, the interim Governor of the Province of Venezuela, Alonso Bernáldez de Quirós, issued a public decree that declared Aguirre guilty of treason against the Spanish crown and its colonial government. In accordance, the judge ordered that “his reputation and the memory of his name to be taken of those for a tyrant and traitor against his king and natural lord, from the time he first planned his tyrannical treason forward.”<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, It ordered that any properties owned by Aguirre be razed and that land on which they stood be covered in salt and any descendants, likely referring to his daughter Elvira, be disinherited and stripped of any titles of nobility. Bernáldez's proclamation concluded: “this sentence against the memory and property of the accused [is] to be executed without recourse to appeal by any person whatsoever.”<sup>55</sup> Such harsh treatment of someone accused of treason in the early colonial period was unprecedented. Even Gonzalo Pizarro, whose rebellion was on a larger scale, was allowed to leave an inheritance, and his heirs were allowed to keep their status as nobles.

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<sup>54</sup> Balkan, *The Wrath of God*, 179 (trans. by author)

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 179 (trans. by author)

With the destruction of Aguirre's physical body and condemnation of his memory, the authorities set about apprehending the large number of Ex-Marañones who had escaped under Governor Collado's pardons. According to Simón,

“The Licenciado Pablo Collado, governor of Venezuela, kept the promises of pardon he had made in the name of the king, with all those who had passed over to the royalist side, treating them well whilst he remained in his district; he also gave them permission to go where they thought proper; so, they scattered themselves about Tierra Firme, sowing the seeds of mutinies and rebellions.”<sup>56</sup>

The Governor's act in pardoning the Ex-Marañones was not seen in a favorable light when it reached the Habsburg monarch back in Spain. On October 3, 1562, King Philip II sent a *cédula* or decree to the Viceroyalty of New Granada, ordering the arrest and punishment of any Ex-Marañón discovered in the territory.

Many of the Ex-Marañones evaded capture. Yet, those arrested, including those who wrote the first written accounts of Aguirre, faced accusations of treason and execution if found guilty. Anton Llamoso, one of Aguirre's most loyal followers, was arrested in the city of Nueva Pamplona del Valle del Espíritu Santo, located in present-day Colombia, and executed, with his head publicly displayed in the town's square. In Mérida, Pedro Sanchez Paniagua was quartered, and in Santafé de Bogotá, at least six others were executed for their roles in the rebellion. Only the Ex-Marañones who penned accounts of their experiences during the expedition were saved from execution. Such swift and severe prosecution by the king against Aguirre and his followers had made it clear that if those accused of having supported his rebellion had any hope of evading a similar fate, they needed to justify their respective roles in the rebellion and distance themselves from the many

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<sup>56</sup> Simón, *Noticias Historiales*, 237

crimes perpetrated. As such, the first generation of Aguirre chroniclers were both figuratively and literally writing for their lives. To accomplish this, the Ex-Marañon chroniclers turned to one of the most tried and tested mediums of writing, the *relaciones*.

In the colonial era, the *relación* or personal account was the primary means through which individuals could present an official report of their experiences and defend their actions. According to the twentieth century colonial historian Beatriz Pastor Bodmer, it “represented something between an epistle and a legal statement. It provided information on a multiplicity of objects, commented on human action and behavior, and described the thoughts and impressions of the author and those around him. But as a legal document, it pledged the writer's word to the veracity of its content. By its very concept, it constituted a guarantee or certificate of the truth of its statement.”<sup>57</sup>

In total, five accounts of the Amazon debacle were produced in the two decades following Aguirre's death. These were: *Relación de la jornada de Omagua y Dorado* by Francisco Vásquez and Pedrarias de Almesto; *Relación de la jornada del Marañon* by Gonzalo de Zúñiga; *Relación Breve* by Pedro de Monguía; *Relación* by Custodio Hernández; and an anonymous chronicle believed to have also been written by Hernández.

The intent of these authors was plain and straightforward: to argue their innocence by explicitly condemning the rebellion and all those associated with it and repositioning the author as an unwilling participant. As such, the ex-Marañones' *relaciones* functioned as an exculpatory narrative, in which the author demonstrated his innocence and distanced himself from association with Aguirre and his rebellion. These narratives generally agree on the basic facts and are universal

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<sup>57</sup> Pastor-Bodmer, *The Armature of Conquest*, 63-64

in their condemnation of Aguirre as a tyrannical madman, but they differ in how they depict specific events and how they frame both their own and Aguirre's role in the larger story.

These are the basic facts and structure of events agreed upon by the chroniclers, though it is important to note their historical accuracy is questionable at the very least due to each author's underlying agenda. Each of these narratives splits the expedition into three distinct sections. The first focuses upon the organization of the El Dorado expedition by Orsúa and concludes with his assassination. The second and shortest spans from the election of don Fernando de Guzmán and similarly concludes with his murder. The final and most descriptive section focuses on Aguirre and follows his path until his execution at Barquisimeto. Aguirre is presented as the most despicable member of the expedition. Yet, he is only one character in a more extensive cast as presented by the Ex-Marañones chroniclers. In the early stages of the expedition, Lope de Aguirre is just one of many soldiers of fortune recruited by Orsúa for his expedition, with the chroniclers granting his character no particular interest until the expedition was well underway. Aguirre is only mentioned by name after the murder of Orsúa, in which he is claimed to have played an active role. Following this, he is presented as indirectly exercising command of the expedition through the election of Don Fernando de Guzmán, whom the chroniclers agree was a disinterested and easily manipulated individual. Aguirre is framed as responsible for the murder of Guzmán and his supporters when they show resistance to his plan of rebellion before taking command of the expedition himself. As depicted by the chroniclers, the only motive behind his rebellion was to install a regime of terror. He murders without reason, other than the pure enjoyment of the act and his madness. He is seen as having no redeeming attributes, and his madness and tyranny are presented as his only defining qualities.

Due to the status of these authors as direct eyewitnesses and their unanimous condemnation, it is easy to accept that their universal depiction of Aguirre as a tyrannical madman is historically accurate. However, each chronicler's underlying agenda of self-exculpation throws the legitimacy of their claims into question. Indeed, a close comparison of each of these sources reveals several inconsistencies and contradictions, evidence that this iteration of Aguirre is not based solely in historical truth, as the authors explicitly claim, but based partly on fiction to frame the author in the best light possible.

The first of the Ex-Marañones to compose a narrative was Gonzalo de Zuñiga. He penned his account in a letter to his father soon after fleeing Aguirre on Margarita Island. Titled *A most trustworthy and true report of all that happened on the River Marañon in the province of El Dorado, and of their coming to and leaving the Island of Margarita*, Zuñiga's account contains all the elements of the self-exculpatory narrative, including the condemnation of Aguirre, a title which attempts to guarantee the truthfulness of the author's words, and intentional distancing of the author from the narrative itself.

The Zúñiga relación is told in the third-person for the most part, which was common practice for some sixteenth-century writers, though the manner in which Zuñiga frames himself in the story is particularly interesting. As the narrative proceeds, Zuñiga establishes his credibility as a participant but quickly distances himself from any association with Aguirre following his entrance into the narrative. This is evidenced by Zuñiga's sudden shift in use of pronouns. When recollecting the expedition during its original mission of conquering El Dorado and Omagua, Zuñiga indirectly includes himself in the narrative through the use of 'we,' "Arriving at another inhabited place, *we* found the Indians unaware of *our* coming, and when they saw our superior



numbers, they adopted a peaceful attitude.”<sup>58</sup> However, following the assassination of Orsúa, Zuñiga quickly shifted to using 'they' for the remainder of his narrative,

“After the Governor's death the expedition moved on. Within two days, *they* reached a village. *They* ate nothing but casaba for the village produced nothing but bitter manioc. Here *they* also tried to come to a decision regarding their future objectives and the rules and regulations of the military organization.”<sup>59</sup>

the narrative's sudden shift in pronoun was doubtless an intentional act by Zuñiga, who wanted to note his participation in the original expedition in search of El Dorado but distance himself from Aguirre and his supporters once the expedition turned to rebellion. In the entirety of the narrative, he only explicitly refers to himself once, albeit in the third person. When describing his escape on Margarita Island, Zuñiga wrote,

“Aguirre bribed the men with grants of Indian slaves and promised them great rewards if they looked in the hills for Gonzalo de Zuñiga (our author!!). The cruel Tyrant had sworn to kill him in the most atrocious manner, surpassing in cruel refinement anything ever perpetrated before, and this because the man had deserted and taken to his heels. During the entire time Aguirre and his men spent on the island, Zuñiga hid in the mountains, eating wild plants and at a great danger to his life, but enduring all this, in order not to be a traitor to His Majesty whom he always had loyally served.”<sup>60</sup>

Overall, Zuñiga's distanced approach was an intentional attempt to establish his participation in the original expedition in search of El Dorado but to remove himself entirely from the narrative for the duration of his participation in Aguirre's rebellion. To further establish his innocence and

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<sup>58</sup> Jay, *Sins, Crimes, and Retribution*, 26

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 32 (trans. by author)

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 51 (trans. by author)

exculpate himself, Zuñiga goes to great lengths to vilify Aguirre and his followers as the sole perpetrators of the atrocities reported in his account. Like the other Ex-Marañones chroniclers, Zuñiga seemingly takes pleasure in vilifying Aguirre with harsher and harsher words. In his relación, Zuñiga included a *Romance on Lope de Aguirre*, which used increasingly negative nouns and adjectives to describe Aguirre: Biscayan, traitor, evil, twisted, vile, dog, rabid, Tyrant. Furthermore, the short romance lists some of the worst acts which Zuñiga accused Aguirre of, including the murder of women, clergy, and royal officials on Margarita Island purely out of enjoyment and the garroting of no less than twenty of his men including Orsúa and Guzmán, as well as Doña Inés. It is impossible to know whether these accusations were true, but by depicting him as a madman and killer beyond reason, Zuñiga attempted to further reposition himself in his narrative as a victim unable to oppose Aguirre under fear of execution.

The second relación is that of Francisco Vásquez. Titled *A Chronicle of the Expedition of Pedro de Orsúa and Lope de Aguirre*, it was first written in 1562 to aid him in his legal defense and subsequently plagiarized by Pedrarias de Alместo for similar purposes. Thus, the works of Vásquez and Alместo can be considered the same account, albeit with some minor differences. Both Vásquez and Alместo engage in a similar process of distancing themselves from Aguirre and justifying their roles in the narrative. Francisco Vásquez defected from Aguirre's camp on Margarita Island, and court records reveal he was apprehended in El Tocuyo in 1562. Vásquez's testimony was used as the critical evidence in his trial and once again by Alместo in his own. It is one of the most comprehensive and detailed accounts and depicts Aguirre in a villainous light similar to the other relaciones. Due to this hyperbolic tone, Vásquez's is one of the most widely cited accounts of the Ex-Marañones. In writing his account some forty years later, Fray Pedro Simón, the great chronicler of New Granada, plagiarized entire passages of this narrative.

Vásquez is quick to establish his credibility as an eyewitness to Aguirre's accused role in the rebellion as “the brain and instigator of all evil.”<sup>61</sup> In recounting the murder of Orsúa, Vásquez states it was “an event which I saw with my own eyes.”<sup>62</sup> He is attempting to justify his role in the rebellion, which alerts readers to possible exaggeration and bias. These become evident through close analysis of the narrative. The most evident instance of this is in how Vásquez describes the expedition following the death of Orsúa. According to his account, only three men opposed Aguirre's rebellious intent, Francisco Vásquez, Juan de Cabañas, and Juan de Vargas-Zapata. According to the other relaciones, both Vargas-Zapata and Cabañas were executed, leaving Vásquez as the only Marañon to have openly defied Aguirre, according to Vásquez himself. The remainder of the relación goes into explicit detail in accusing Aguirre of having murdered individuals for much less, calling Vásquez's narrative and truthfulness into question.

The Vásquez-Almesto relación presents a near total condemnation of Aguirre and his actions. In the final chapter of the lengthy narrative, titled “A Portrait of Lope de Aguirre,” Vásquez provides a lengthy description of Aguirre:

“He was a bad Christian possibly even a Lutheran or worse, for he did and said things we have described before: killing friars, women, and innocent people without giving them a chance to confess their sins, though they asked for this, and it could have been arranged. One of his regular vices was to commend his soul and person to the devil, detailing in his cursing his head, arms, legs, and even all he possessed. He seldom spoke well of a person, not even of his friends, and he slandered everybody. To conclude- there was not a single vice that could not be found in that person.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Vasquez, *El Dorado: Cronica De La Expedición De Pedro De Ursua y Lope De Aguirre*, 69

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 70

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 72

As evidenced by this depiction, Aguirre is accused of being an individual whose traits run against everything considered important by Spanish society during the period, most importantly, loyalty to God and the King. Vásquez takes his vilification of Aguirre a step further by painting him as the anti-conquistador. That being, Aguirre is painted as an antithesis of characteristics which were generally believed to define a model conquistador, namely allegiance to the Spanish Crown and a restraint against using excessive violence. This narrative does recollect some more positive qualities of Aguirre, noting that he was a “fine foot soldier” and that “he was possessed of an acute and lively intelligence, though completely uneducated.”<sup>64</sup> However, Vásquez does make sure to discount these positive attributes of Aguirre in the narrative's conclusion by providing a lengthy description of all the crimes and rebellions he was purported to have engaged in prior to the El Dorado expedition.

The third Ex-Marañón to write a relación on Aguirre and his rebellion was Custodio Hernández, who is generally credited with actually having killed Aguirre at Barquisimeto—written while facing trial at Santo Domingo in 1562. His relación bears a lengthy and descriptive title: *A very true report that deals with everything that happened during the expedition of Pedro de Orsúa in search of El Dorado and Omagua, and the rebellion of Don Fernando de Guzmán and the very cruel Tyrant Lope de Aguirre, his successor: and how they killed the Governor in the province of Machifaro and of the deaths that this cruel Tyrant gave to his friends, hidalgos, good soldiers, and to friars, clerics, women ... not sparing anyone; and yes, it is true.* It is important to note that, unlike Vásquez and Zuñiga, Hernandez remained in Aguirre's camp until the very end as one of the last Marañones to defect to the royalist side. Thus, he faced a much more difficult challenge in arguing his innocence.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 72

Hernandez's account is perhaps the best example of how the Ex-Marañones vilified Aguirre in order to exculpate themselves. Hernández recounts all the general events of the expedition, including several of Aguirre's speeches, and explicitly refers to him as the Tyrant for most of the narrative. Hernandez is unsparing in his portrayal of Aguirre as a villain and madman. In particular, he emphasizes Aguirre's seeming affinity for murder. In recounting the murder of Garcia de Arce, he writes that Aguirre had killed him “because he had been a captain of Governor Orsúa and his friend, and that they were afraid of him because he was a good man of character.”<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Hernandez notes that Aguirre ordered the death of Doña Inés solely out of jealousy and explicitly names his role in the majority of murders committed during the rebellion.

The best evidence that Hernandez's *relación* was written as a self-exculpatory narrative is how he emphasizes specific points in the narrative. Hernandez devotes only a few lines to the recollection of the murder of Orsúa and is generally vague in describing the progression of events. Yet, in detailing his own role in capturing and killing Aguirre, Hernandez devotes multiple pages to the event, mentioning himself repeatedly,

“When Custodio Hernandez saw that most of his friends and many others had already crossed into the royal camp, he mounted his horse and rode downhill towards the fort. He loaded his harquebus, entered the fort, and asked for Aguirre, upon which the Tyrant made his appearance. Hernandez aimed his gun at him and said: “You are a prisoner of war; drop the harquebus you carry in your hands!” The Tyrant said, “So, I am a prisoner,” and Hernandez took the prisoner's sword and dagger. The Tyrant confirmed, “it is true that Custodio Hernandez arrested me.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Pastor, *Lope de Aguirre y la Rebelión de los Marañones*, 87

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 363 (trans. by author)

Due to the nature of the source, it is doubtful that this story is entirely truthful. Indeed, the only other account to back up this story is an anonymous account, written around the same time as Hernandez's. Hernandez was likely the author of this account, intentionally making it anonymous to bolster his defense of innocence. Though the authorship of this anonymous chronicle cannot be fully attributed to Hernandez, in writing a secondary account which bolstered the claims in the Ex-Marañón's own narrative, he likely sought to provide further supposed evidence of his innocence.

Pedro de Monguía, who had served as Aguirre's captain of the guard, wrote a similar self-exculpatory relación following his capture. He had been one of the Marañones sent by Aguirre to commandeer Montesinos's ship and had turned himself in soon after. Monguía recollects many of Aguirre's alleged crimes on Margarita Island, and his overall narrative lines up with those provided by the other Ex-Marañones. Furthermore, he is just as eager to condemn Aguirre and frame himself as having never supported the rebellion. This is evidenced by the inclusion of Fray Montesinos's official letter warning the Venezuelan mainland of Aguirre's presence on Margarita,

“The most suitable means for the destruction of the tyrant could be arranged and at least so that he could not carry out the evil and diabolical intent that he purposed, of destroying the whole of the Spanish Main, up to Nombre de Dios, from where he intends to enter Peru to become king and lord there.”<sup>67</sup>

Though this condemnation was not the author's words, its inclusion suggests that it was meant to bolster Monguía's claim of innocence and further distance himself from association with Aguirre. His relación concludes with a brief passage by Montesinos, which attempted to validate Monguía's claims as truthful.

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<sup>67</sup> Lewis, *The Miraculous Lie*, 51 (trans. by author)

In writing their self-exculpatory *relaciones*, the Ex-Marañones seem to have succeeded in their goal of arguing their innocence. Gonzalo de Zuñiga received a sentence of perpetual banishment from the Indies on 25 October 1562. Pedrarias de Alместo received a “sentence favorable to the interested party”<sup>68</sup> by the Real Audiencia of Santa Fe in November of that same year. Francisco Vásquez and Custodio Hernandez seem to have received similar sentences as they reappeared in Tocuyo as witnesses in the trial of their fellow Ex-Marañon, Pero Alonso Galeas.<sup>69</sup> The post-arrest fate of Pedro de Monguía is unknown. In each of these cases, the Ex-Marañones presented their *relaciones* as critical evidence in defense of their innocence. As such, in repurposing Aguirre’s legacy, the Ex-Marañon chroniclers had a clear agenda of self-exculpation. Each author seemingly placed themselves in a position which would be most advantageous in their own respective defense and thus each narrative often contradicted one another. For example, Francisco Vásquez explicitly notes that he refused to sign Aguirre’s declaration of allegiance. A claim which was contradicted by the accounts of Gonzalo de Zuñiga and Custodio Hernandez. It is evident that each author intentionally repositioned themselves in their respective narratives, in the several contradictory claims that appear in each, and their universal denunciation of Aguirre and his actions. These *relaciones* were to be read by colonial representatives charged with determining the author’s guilt or innocence. This meant that the Ex-Marañones created a self-affirming and therefore alien representation of Aguirre. Each writer created a sort of monster that best suited their respective interests and thus one based in plausible reality yet heavily fictionalized. Due to these authors’ status as eyewitnesses, their accounts, though heavily imbued with biases, are perhaps the closest representations we have of the historical Aguirre. Certainly, they provided the basis for all subsequent works concerning his legacy. Yet, these accounts should

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<sup>68</sup> Jos, *La Expedición de Orsúa*, 276

<sup>69</sup> Balkan, *The Wrath of God*, 181

be seen as self-exculpatory legal documents as opposed to simple objective accounts. As future chapters will show, the further detached each author is from the historical Aguirre, their repurposing and underlying motives become more overt and embrace an increasingly fictionalized Aguirre.



### **Chapter 3: Aguirre the Devil (1580-1723)**

Moving to the second generation of Aguirre chroniclers and writers, time did nothing to rescue Aguirre from condemnation, nor did it quell interest in his image. From the mid-sixteenth until the late seventeenth century, a large body of secondary accounts, semi-fictional narratives, and epic poems were produced concerning the ‘tyrant’ Aguirre and the Marañones rebellion. Now one generation removed from the fateful events, the second wave of chroniclers transformed the self-exculpatory accounts of the Ex-Marañones into highly stylized narratives which placed greater emphasis on the author's presentation of the story and moral judgments than on an adherence to the historical record of Aguirre. These chroniclers were even harsher in their treatment of Aguirre than the Ex-Marañones, essentially stripping him of any redeeming qualities and unanimously depicting him as a villainous and evil figure. It is important to note that as time passed, authors began to show a greater interest in the historical legacy of Aguirre, though they remained unanimous in their vilification of his image. This chapter analyzes the background of the second generation of Aguirre chroniclers and examines how their respective agendas and biases drove them to create a somewhat fictitious and heavily vilified portrait of Aguirre, which would persist for several centuries. This chapter will show that the second generation of chroniclers had clear intentions that went beyond simple historical documentation. Aguirre became a core player in a cosmic moral tale. Thus, the versions of Aguirre produced during this era was based more on each author's interests and moral judgments and less on objective historical documentation.

The second-generation cronistas and their respective works are as follows: *Recopilación Historial* by Pedro de Aguado (1583); *Elegías de Varones Ilustres de Indias* by Juan de

Castellanos (1588); *El Marañón* by Diego de Aguilar y Córdoba (c. 1570-80s); *Brief Description of all the lands of Peru, Tucuman, Río de la Plata and Chile* by Reginaldo de Lizárraga (1609-11); *Noticias historiales de las conquistas de Tierra Firme en las Indias Occidentales* by Pedro Simón (1626); *Compendio y Descripción de las Indias Occidentales* by Antonio Vázquez de Espinosa (1628); and *Historia de la Conquista y Población de la Provincia de Venezuela* by José de Oviedo y Baños. All of these works are unanimous in their condemnation of Aguirre and contain abundant instances of borrowing from one another and key similarities in how they repurpose Aguirre's legacy as a moralistic teaching tool.

In writing on Aguirre and the Marañones rebellion, these chroniclers, nearly all of them Catholic priests, had several reasons to reaffirm Aguirre's legacy as that of an unredeemable villain. At the forefront of their writing, they sought to ensure that the Orsúa-Aguirre story would not be forgotten or relegated to obscurity. In writing their overall histories of the Indies, the main concern of the second-generation of chroniclers was to document the history of the Spanish conquest and settlement of the Indies within a moralistic framework. For the colonial chroniclers of the late-sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the idea of historical truth was not just based in the historic facts but was also deeply rooted in the ideals of the ultimate authority of the Church and Crown. It is important to note that the cronistas did not unanimously glorify the acts of the conquistadors or encomenderos who showed loyalty towards the Crown and Church; instead, acts of conquest aimed at fortune or fame were treated somewhat critically as evidenced by such chroniclers as Bartolomé de las Casas. However, chroniclers were almost unanimous in their condemnation of individuals who rebelled against Spanish authority, such as Gonzalo Pizarro and Lope de Aguirre. These individuals were treated as abominable examples of evil who were seemingly detached from the larger history of the conquest.

It is important to note that in writing their respective histories of the Indies, the chroniclers utilized a wide array of literary mediums and discussed a varying array of topics alongside history. For example, Antonio Vázquez de Espinosa devoted large sections of his chronicle to mining operations and the recording of indigenous flora and fauna. His work can thus be considered as a travel book in which Espinosa recorded anything which he found particularly interesting or noteworthy. Similarly, Castellanos wrote his *Elegías Varones* as an epic poem meant to heroicize and romanticize those individuals he considered to be particularly noteworthy as well as to vilify those he considered to be evil. The mediums in which these chroniclers wrote influenced how their writings painted both the Indies itself and the historical figures they depicted. In regard to Aguirre, poetic accounts tended to treat him as a more distant figure, akin to classical histories. Likewise, historical chroniclers, such as Simón, generally framed Aguirre as a more recent figure and thus devoted more effort to contextualizing his rebellion and connecting it to the larger history of the conquest.

Secondly, the dark shading of Aguirre's legacy during this period was greatly impacted by each author's own background and underlying biases. Much of what these chroniclers wrote about and the manner in which they arranged their overall chronicles were influenced by their own experiences in the Indies. For example, the topics discussed by Espinosa were arranged according to the order in which he travelled across the Indies. Regarding Aguirre's place in each of these chronicles, it appeared and reappeared multiple times throughout the overall narrative, often placed within a larger chapter discussing the history or ethnography of New Granada or Margarita Island where the chronicler undoubtedly heard accounts of Aguirre's rebellion. His story was placed alongside other historic episodes that the author considered of particular noteworthiness and was framed as a cosmic struggle between good and evil, akin to a sermon

given by a preacher to his flock. Furthermore, the majority of these chroniclers came from religious backgrounds, and as such treated Aguirre and his rebellion as the perfect example of a moral struggle, inserting a divine aspect into Aguirre's story in which God and The Devil played active roles in both guiding and quelling his rebellion.

It is important to note that Aguirre was not framed as explicitly attacking the Church as an institution. Instead, he was repurposed to represent immoral behavior and as in essence a literary personification of the Seven Deadly Sins. Indeed, in painting their respective representations of Aguirre, each chronicler paid special attention to aspects of Aguirre's character that embodied sinful behavior, whether it be envy, greed, wrath, or lust. Conversely, figures such as Orsúa, Doña Inés, and clergymen were presented in accordance with the contrasting Seven Virtues. This contrast simplified the story of Aguirre into one emphasizing moralistic struggle between vice and virtue which was easily digestible for readers. To accomplish this, each chronicler highlighted Aguirre's animosity towards doctrinal teachings and representations of vice or virtue, his supposed alliance with the Devil, and explicitly noted aspects of his story that personified a particularly sinful behavior. Throughout each of these narratives, the author inserted his own moral judgements and commentary, explicitly denouncing Aguirre's acts and noting that Aguirre's story should be read as a negative example of moral behavior: a story instructing readers on how not to act.

As this chapter will show, the authors' own religious biases resulted in Aguirre's legacy being transformed into a semi-historical and partly fictional narrative of a cosmic struggle between good and evil, meant to instruct readers on righteous moral behavior. By depicting Aguirre in such a horrific and abominable manner, these chroniclers sought to deter any readers from following a similar path. Thus, each of these authors had intent behind their vilification of

Aguirre's legacy or underlying agenda in chronicling his story which went beyond historically recoding his story. Furthermore, this chapter will highlight how each of these chroniclers placed Aguirre's story into their larger narratives to better contextualize their respective treatment of the Basque rebel.

Fray Pedro de Aguado was the first of the second-generation chroniclers to write on Aguirre and his rebellion, producing his *Recopilación Historial* in 1583. In order to understand exactly how and why he wrote about Aguirre, it is necessary to look at Aguado's life and background. Born in Valdemoro, Spain, in the 1530s, Aguado joined the Franciscan Order in his early adulthood, before arriving in Cartagena no later than 1561. According to his *Probanza de Servicios*, Aguado spent several years preaching to the indigenous communities in New Granada, successfully establishing two churches in the region.<sup>70</sup> In 1571, the friar moved to Santa Fe de Bogotá, where he was elected as Minister Official for his successes in converting indigenous communities across New Granada. During the next several years, Aguado was tasked with defending the Franciscan Order from accusations of corruption by local encomenderos who opposed the Church's attempts to protect indigenous communities from mistreatment. In 1575, he returned to Spain to defend the Franciscans from such accusations of corruption in the Royal Court and did not return to New Granada until 1583.<sup>71</sup> It was during these eight years that Aguado compiled his *Recopilación Historial*. Despite several attempts, Aguado was unsuccessful in publishing his final manuscript, with it being rejected by the Royal Censor no less than three times. In 1583, Aguado returned to New Granada and spent the remainder of his

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<sup>70</sup> Fals-Borda, *Fray Pedro de Aguado*, 541

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 541

life as a clergyman. The exact year of his death has been lost to history, though various estimates have placed it anywhere from 1589 to 1608.<sup>72</sup>

Turning to *Recopilación Historial*, in writing this historical chronicle Fray Aguado sought to record the history and conquest of the New Kingdom of Granada and present the Spanish conquistadors in a heroic light. Aguado wrote of Aguirre in the sixteenth section of his book and placed his story alongside the histories of the discovery of the island of Trinidad and settlement of Cartagena. Specifically, Aguirre's story was told as part of a larger section devoted to the city of Borburata where his rebellion was defeated. Thus, Aguado treated Aguirre as a recent historical figure, while transforming the Basque rebel into a literary example of immoral behavior. Relying upon the Ex-Marañones testimonies and eyewitness accounts, Aguado's retelling covered all the major episodes recorded by Vásquez, including the murder of Orsúa and Guzmán, the sacking of Margarita Island, and Aguirre's demise at Barquisimeto. However, in writing his account, Aguado's inserted several 'facts' not mentioned by the Marañones and reconfigured the characters of Orsúa and Aguirre.

In Aguado's presentation of the events, Orsúa is reconfigured to represent a virtuous figure. Aguado highlights the governor's popularity amongst his men and reputation as a virtuous and noble gentleman. The Ex-Marañones' criticism of Orsúa as an ineffective leader is wiped from this account. Instead, he is an honorable gentleman and ideal model of a conquistador and faithful vassal to the Spanish Crown. Conversely, Aguado is unsparing in his condemnation of Aguirre, whom he claims to have been responsible for some of the "greatest cruelties, deaths, and robberies."<sup>73</sup> in the province of Venezuela and "who in all kinds of wickedness and shamelessness exceeded all the tyrants and rebels who were and have been in the

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 557

<sup>73</sup> Aguado, *Recopilación Historial*, 129

Indies.”<sup>74</sup> Aguado's religious background clearly influenced his perception of Aguirre, as his depiction is heavily imbued with religious principles and explicit references to God and the devil as the driving forces behind this bloody episode. The Fray reconfigured the Aguirre of the Ex-Marañones, one whose disdain for the Spanish Crown drove his actions, to one whose pure hatred and rejection of God was the driving force behind his rebellion.

In painting a general literary portrait of Aguirre, Aguado claims, “he was an enemy of good and of all virtue, especially of praying and of devout men, and so any prayers made in front of him would be broken, saying he did not want the soldiers to be Christian or pray, but if it were necessary, they play dice with the devil instead.”<sup>75</sup> Aguado's Aguirre is stripped of any redeeming attributes. In referencing the death of Elvira, Aguado explains that Aguirre committed this act “because this man was naturally so cruel and enjoyed spilling blood, paternal blood did not hinder him.”<sup>76</sup> The Fray is equally unsparing in his presentation of the Marañones, whose testimonies provided the basis for his own work, referring to them as Aguirre's mutinous ‘minions’ and ‘henchmen.’ While the Ex-Marañones had claimed that their fear of Aguirre and the hostility of the Amazon dissuaded their attempts to kill Aguirre, Aguado directly asserts the involvement of the devil in protecting and guiding Aguirre so as to prolong his path of destruction. Several times throughout his narrative, Aguado asserts “that the devil, as a familiar friend of Aguirre, would allow him to manifest and say what happened there”<sup>77</sup> and “when he was taken by the devil for even a small occasion, he kills.”<sup>78</sup> In recounting Aguirre's actions, Aguado paid special attention to acts committed against clergymen. For example, he devoted

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 735

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 422

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 417

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 317

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 433

several paragraphs to an incident on Margarita Island in which Aguirre murdered two Dominican Friars, allegedly due to his hatred of Christianity, something which was not present in the accounts of the Ex-Marañones and likely a fabrication of the author.

According to Aguado, Aguirre's reign of terror "is ended knowing that his soul and body will last forever in infernal punishments, from which God our Lord freed us and gave us his glory."<sup>79</sup> By emphasizing Aguirre's cruelties against clergy and his claimed association with the Devil, Aguado reconfigured the historical Aguirre and The Marañones rebellion into a moralistic tale of the struggle between the forces of good and evil where Aguirre is the main villain and evil incarnate. Thus, Aguado created a literary iteration of Aguirre, who represented everything that went against canonical teaching and the supposed tenets of colonial society and thus served as an exemplum of immoral behavior. The reasoning behind Pedro de Aguado's brutal treatment of Aguirre's image was straightforward. As a member of the clergy, Aguado viewed the goals of the conquest to be the conversion and education of the indigenous populations. In his view, conquest for profit was an unnatural and corrupting force. As such, Aguirre represented everything that Aguado stood against. In his eyes, Aguirre is an individual whose rebellion exemplified the greater period of rebellion and corruption viewed as hindering the Church's mission and thus a villain. This account reads much like a religious sermon and does not shy away from including explicit warnings of the consequences of rejecting the teaching of the Church, in Aguirre's case, eternal damnation. Thus, Aguado used the story of Aguirre as an educational tale in which readers could see what it meant to be both a good and bad Christian under the guise of historical documentation of the conquest of New Granada. His total vilification of Aguirre showed little

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 4054



interest in examining Aguirre as a historical figure, instead presenting Aguirre as an antithesis of how Spaniards and Christians should act in the Indies.

The next chronicler to reconfigure Aguirre was the poet, chronicler, and soldier Juan de Castellanos who penned *his Elegías de Varones Ilustres de Indias* in 1588 while serving as the curate of Tunja, New Granada. Written as an epic poem, Castellanos' work narrated the general history of the Indies spanning from the arrival of Columbus in 1492 until Aguirre's rebellion in 1561. Acting somewhat as a capstone to the priest's long life in New Granada, Castellanos sought "to sing in Castilian verse the variety and wealth of things that have occurred in the Indies... of these West Indies, where I have spent much and the best of my life."<sup>80</sup> In glorification of the Spanish conquest, he devoted several poetic elegies toward individuals whom he considered to be important in the conquest and settlement of America such as Ponce de Leon and Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada as well as those he considered to be exempla of villainous behavior, namely Lope de Aguirre. In total, roughly 3,000 of 113,609 lines of *The Elegías Varones* were devoted to recounting the Aguirre-Orsúa episode in his Canto XIV.

To better understand how and why Castellanos wrote on Aguirre, it is necessary to analyze his own experience in the Indies briefly. Born in Seville in 1522, Castellanos traveled to Puerto Rico as a cavalry soldier no later than 1545.<sup>81</sup> Much like Aguirre, Castellanos engaged in a wide array of professions during his time in the Indies: as a pearl fisher in Cubagau, a soldier in military campaigns in New Granada from 1541-5, and finally as a Catholic priest and curate across New Granada. Ordained in Cartagena as a priest in 1545, Castellanos was the curate of Cartagena, Riohacha, and Tunja until his death in 1606.<sup>82</sup> This diversity of professions gave

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<sup>80</sup> Castellanos, *Elegías Varones*, 18

<sup>81</sup> Galster, *Aguirre oder Die Willkür*, 120

<sup>82</sup> Márquez, *Puerto Rican Poetry*, 11

Castellanos experience as both a conquistador and clergyman, which would heavily influence his presentation of Aguirre. Castellanos penned his *Elegías de Varones* during his ten-year period as the curate of Tunja, relying upon interviews, church archives, and in Aguirre's case: The Ex-Marañones narratives.<sup>83</sup>

Castellanos' *Elegías XIV*, which discussed Aguirre and his rebellion, began with an elegy to Pedro de Orsúa, which exalted and romanticized his deeds, claiming, "He discovered the most secluded paths; he leveled the rigorous mountains; he conquered the province of the Musos, a most difficult task."<sup>84</sup> It continued to narrate the earlier El Dorado expedition of Gonzalo Pizarro and Francisco de Orellana before beginning a recounting of the Aguirre-Orsúa episode. Unlike Aguado's earlier narrative, that of Castellanos was closer to the account provided by the Ex-Marañones, including all the major episodes of the rebellion. Although retaining many of the Ex-Marañones' assertions about the events, Castellanos stylized his reiteration to a high degree. The romantic relationship between Orsúa and Doña Inés was emphasized as a critical element of the story, and they are both reconfigured to be tragic figures whose romance led to their respective downfalls, akin to the Shakespearean characters of Romeo and Juliet. Evidence of Castellanos' literary stylization and romanticization can be observed in his depiction of the murder of Doña Inés, as Castellanos wrote,

"The birds mourned the trees / The wild beasts of the forest lamented / The waters ceased to murmur / The fishes beneath the water wailed / The winds execrated the deed / When Llamoso cut the veins of her white neck/ Wretch! Wert, thou born of a woman? / No!

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<sup>83</sup> Simón, *Noticias Historiales*, xxxiv

<sup>84</sup> Castellanos, *Elegías Varones*, 232

what beast could have such a wicked son? / How was it thou did not die/ In imagining a treason so enormous?”<sup>85</sup>

As evidenced by this passage, the figures of Orsúa and Doña Inés are transformed by Castellanos to become symbols of tragedy and innocent victims of the cruelties of Aguirre. This is in stark contrast to the Ex-Marañones testimonies, which reported Orsúa's inadequacy and poor leadership as his downfall.

Turning to Aguirre, Castellanos was unsparing in his vilification of the rebel, whom he referred to as ‘the bad beast.’ In depicting Aguirre, Castellanos claimed,

“He was of small composure, / Big head, great liveliness, / But the most wicked creature, / Which of reason formed nature / All precautions, all pure evil, / Without mixture of virtue or nobility; / His words, his dealings, his government / They were like hell.”<sup>86</sup>

Much like Aguado's earlier portrait, the image of Aguirre created by Castellanos was intended to serve as an example of negative moral behavior by focusing on attacking Aguirre’s character versus focusing on historical facts. While Castellanos did emphasize Aguirre's contempt towards Christianity, his depiction of Aguirre was considerably more muted than that of Aguado in explaining the motivations behind Aguirre's actions. Whereas Aguado emphasizes the role of The Devil and presents Aguirre as a demonic force, Castellanos presents Aguirre in a more factual manner, though still emphasizes his unvirtuous and immoral nature. This is best evidenced in how Castellanos, depicting the death of Elvira and Aguirre's rationale behind his act:

“Pass where mortals pass, / give an end to sinful people, / bad one's end with their evils, / my day has come, your time has come: / I do not want the loyal ones to call you the

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 649

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 641

traitor's daughter, or the traitor. / And to top off his bad deeds, / he stabbed her in the breast.”<sup>87</sup>

As evidence by this passage, Castellanos paid particular attention to Aguirre’s murder of female characters to further condemn his character. It is important to note that his account explicitly condemned Aguirre to fit its purpose as a moral teaching referencing to Aguirre as “Bad, cruel, bestial, silly, drunk / Everywhere he spread his vileness.”<sup>88</sup> and as “bestial and pure evil.”<sup>89</sup>

Castellanos did not include any of the letters claimed to have been written by Aguirre, and his interation ended with a summary of how order and peace was restored to the region of Venezuela and the of fates of some involved in the rebellion. Thus, Castellanos heavily stylized his iteration of Aguirre, as an unredeemable villain, to use his image as a deterrent to immoral behavior.

The next chronicler to focus upon Aguirre and his rebellion was the Augustinian preacher and colonial official, Diego de Aguilar y Córdoba, in his account titled *El Marañon*. Aguilar y Córdoba relied upon the Ex-Marañones narratives to compile an extensive retelling of the Orsúa-Aguirre episode. Very little is known about the background of this author. However, it is believed that he was born in the Spanish city of Córdoba to a noble family. In early adulthood, Aguilar y Córdoba traveled to the Indies as a soldier, likely serving in military campaigns in The Captaincy General of Chile. He was heavily invested in mining ventures across the Indies, including the silver mining hubs of Cajatambo and Potosí.<sup>90</sup> Though these ventures never granted him any considerable fortunes, his political career in the Indies was highly successful. Around 1567, he was granted a position in the Audiencia de Concepcion of Chile and was later appointed as the Chief Corregidor of Huánuco by Viceroy Francisco de Toledo in 1570. He served as The

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 687

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 655

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 660

<sup>90</sup> Galster, *Aguirre oder Die Willkür*, 225

Corregidor of Vilcabamba and Huamanga in 1602 and 1603-4, respectively.<sup>91</sup> It was during his tenure as Corregidor of Huánuco that Aguilar y Córdoba wrote *El Marañon*, and it was published in Spain in 1609.<sup>92</sup> Overall, Aguilar y Córdoba's account was primarily focused upon Aguirre's rebellion, though it covered other aspects of the Spanish exploration of the Marañon.

In explaining why he decided to write on Aguirre and his rebellion, the author lays out his intentions in the opening lines of his writings. According to Aguilar y Córdoba, he wrote his *El Marañon* under the conviction

“that history, among other properties that it has, is very important as a guide to human life, and that this, with the cruelties and outrages that it has, will be a guide to the reader of a bad and abominable way of life ... it is not to be wished for, and thus it is a life not to be led because it was a death without hope, or health, and of hatred of men and abhorrence of God.”<sup>93</sup>

Thus, Aguilar y Córdoba felt compelled to write about Aguirre as a moral guide and to prevent the lessons of the historical event from being lost to history. Furthermore, his work can be considered as a historical chronicle primarily devoted to the episodes of Aguirre rebellion. Spanning roughly four hundred pages, Aguilar y Córdoba covered all the major events of the rebellion, including Aguirre's letter to King Philip II, the second chronicler to do so after Francisco Vásquez. Though he states that his work is an objective account of the history of the Marañon River and the Orsúa-Aguirre incident, he is totally condemning of Aguirre as a tyrant and villain. In a section titled, 'A Description of Lope de Aguirre,' Aguilar y Córdoba penned a brief recollection of Aguirre's misdeeds and characteristics:

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<sup>91</sup> Jay, *Sins, Crimes, and Retribution*, 113

<sup>92</sup> Galster, *Aguirre oder Die Willkür*, 225

<sup>93</sup> Aguilar y Córdoba, *El Marañon* (1578), 51

"He had an ill-shaped face, was lantern-jawed, and had small beady, uneasy eyes which, when he was annoyed flashed and moved restlessly. For a person without education, he had an acute and lively brain, capable of enduring prolonged hardship, during the entire time of his tyrannical regime, very few saw him ever sleep, for he was always alert and on guard. He liked walking, and he did this often; he could carry heavy equipment as well as his weighty weapons. He was always fully armed. Wearing two coats of mail, one between his shirts and the other one on the outside. He was of deceitful disposition and unpredictable in his action. He loved to associate with lewd, evil, and depraved persons, and however despicable a man was, a thief, vile, cruel, the more he regarded him as a friend. Aguirre was cunning, fickle, and treacherous. He never kept a promise. He was a lecher, a glutton and a drunkard. He never spoke well of anybody, not even of his own friends. He was always restless and loved rebellions and mutinies."<sup>94</sup>

As evidenced by this extended passage, Aguilar y Córdoba is entirely condemning of Aguirre, emphasizing the many characteristics which the author views as immoral and irredeemable. The reasoning behind why Aguilar y Córdoba depicted Aguirre in such a heinous manner is two-fold. First, as expressed in the introductory passage of *El Marañón*, he sought to present Aguirre and his actions as a moral guide to readers by reconfiguring the historical Aguirre into an almost fictitious embodiment of immorality and evil. Secondly, Aguirre's rebellion had been expressly aimed at overthrowing the Spanish colonial authorities in the Indies, and as such, Aguilar y Córdoba had a vested interest in condemning such actions to deter such ideals from persisting. Thus, in writing on Aguirre, he sought to walk a fine line where Aguirre

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 212

would be remembered as an example of evil and immoral behavior and deter any attempts at redeeming Aguirre in a more heroic light.

The next of the second-generation chroniclers to write an account of the Orsúa-Aguirre expedition was the Dominican Bishop, Reginaldo de Lizarraga, whose *Descripción del Perú, Tucumán, Río de la Plata y Chile* was published in 1609.<sup>95</sup> Like Pedro de Aguado, Lizarraga was a peninsular who spent most of his life in the Americas as a clergy member before writing his chronicle. Born in 1533 in Lizarraga, Spain, Lizarraga spent his youth receiving an education in Spain before entering the Dominican Order in 1560. That same year, he traveled to the Americas under the sponsorship of the Marquis of Cañete, the official responsible for sponsoring the Orsúa expedition. Lizarraga spent his first several decades in the Americas preaching to indigenous populations before being appointed Bishop of Concepción in 1598.<sup>96</sup> In 1609, he spent five months as The Bishop of Paraguay before his death in November of that year. It is believed that Lizarraga penned his chronicle his tenure in this position.

Regarding his depiction of Aguirre, Lizarraga devoted Chapter 17 of Book 2 to the Orsúa-Aguirre episode. His recounting of Aguirre's rebellion was preceded by a biography of the Marquis of Cañete, who had sponsored Lizarraga's voyage to the Indies, as well as a description of the expeditions which had departed from Peru under the Marquis' oversight. Lizarraga framed his account of Aguirre's rebellion within a larger description of the Marquis of Cañete's life, spanning from his appointment until death. As a result, Lizarraga's high praise of the Marquis of Cañete, who had also sponsored Orsúa's failed expedition, gave Lizarraga an additional incentive behind vilifying Aguirre and his rebellion in his account. Thus, his account of Aguirre was contained in a larger narrative praising the Marquis of Cañete.

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<sup>95</sup> Galster, *Aguirre oder Die Willkür*, 224

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 225

This account covered several of the main events of the rebellion, though he excluded any mention of Margarita Island or final Aguirre's campaign across mainland Venezuela. As with the other second-generation chroniclers, Lizarraga was unsparing in his total vilification of Aguirre. In painting his portrait of him, Lizarraga wrote,

"Aguirre now turned into a cruel and despotic monster, and I find it extraordinary that soldiers who in general abominated impiety should have lived in fear of him and never ventured to stop him. He killed all who resisted or even those who displayed, by their gloomy expression, their disagreement. If men congregated, he killed them. Never before have I heard or read of such a manifestation of pure evil."<sup>97</sup>

Furthermore, Lizarraga, likely influenced by his religious background, emphasized Aguirre's relationship with the devil in guiding his actions. In recounting the murder of Orsúa, Lizarraga wrote, "the devil took possession of the bodies of the murderous devils – I call them that on account of their evil deeds and all that followed, and I single out, in particular, Lope de Aguirre, a demon."<sup>98</sup> Lizarraga's narrative is perhaps the best example of how the second-generation chroniclers transformed the Ex-Marañones accounts into a moralistic tale which warned readers of the consequences of going against the Church. In referencing the death of Aguirre at Borburata, Lizarraga inserted his own judgments of Aguirre's fate after death, writing,

"It may well be that he finds himself in the company of the worse sinners, and that his torment will be greater than those of the pagans, for he was a Christian who had committed sacrileges, countless atrocities and who died without repentance. Where else

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<sup>97</sup> Lizarraga, *Descripción Del Reino Del Perú, Tucumán, Río De La Plata y Chile*, 108

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 110



can he be but in hell? This was the end of an impious tyrant known as such in this kingdom, and his crimes caused a great stir.”<sup>99</sup>

This quotation is of special interest in examining how the second-generation chroniclers sought to repurpose Aguirre. Driven by his religious background, Lizarraga inferred that Aguirre would face eternal damnation as a result of his rebellion, a trope which is present in the majority of second-generation depictions of Aguirre. By emphasizing the divine punishment of Aguirre, Lizarraga could insert a final warning to readers about the consequences of following a similar path to that of Aguirre. As such, Lizarraga intentionally vilified Aguirre to instruct readers on immoral behavior and its consequences.

Of all the second-generation chroniclers, perhaps the most prolific and significant was the Franciscan Friar and chronicler, Pedro Simón. Born in the Spanish city of San Lorenzo de la Parilla in 1574, Simón wrote on Aguirre relatively late in comparison to the other second-generation chroniclers.<sup>100</sup> Like Pedro de Aguado and Juan de Castellanos, he received an education in Spain before travelling to New Granada, first arriving in the port city of Cartagenas de Indias in 1603. Simón spent his early years in the Indies preaching to the indigenous populations as well as serving as the official chronicler for Juan de Borja’s 1608 conquest of the Pijao peoples in modern-day Colombia. On June 3, 1623, Simón was elected as *Custodio de la Provincia Franciscana del Nuevo Reino de Granada*, or Custodian of the Franciscan Province of the New Kingdom of Granada. As one of the leading Franciscans in the Indies, Simón devoted his time in the Indies to chronicling his version of the history of New Granada. Between 1623-1626, he wrote, *Noticias historiales de las conquistas de Tierra Firme en la Indias Occidentales*, a comprehensive historical chronicle of both the Muisca indigenous group as well as the

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 112-3

<sup>100</sup> Simón, *Noticias Historiales*, xxxvii

settlement of the region during the era of conquest.<sup>101</sup> After its publishment in Cuenca, Spain in 1626, Simón spent his remaining years in a Franciscan convent in Ubaté, Cundinamarca, passing between 1626-1628.<sup>102</sup>

In total, Simón's *Noticias Historiales* was divided into seven different sections detailing the history of present-day Colombia and Venezuela. Simón's work was a historical chronicle of the conquest in New Granada and as such was much more objective than those of Aguado or Castellanos. Indeed, the passage of time seems to have granted him a greater sense of objectivity in chronicling the conquest. Only the sixth of his *Noticias* was published during his own lifetime and was devoted to chronicling the Orsúa-Aguirre episode, a total of fifty-two chapters. In writing his comprehensive retelling of the episode, Simón relied upon a variety of sources, including the Vásquez-Almesto narrative as well as the earlier secondary accounts of Aguado and Castellanos. Indeed, several passages of Simón's own chronicle were directly copied from one or another of these sources almost verbatim. Furthermore, much like these authors, Simón had a similar interest in presenting Aguirre's story as a moralistic struggle between good and evil, though his work gave considerably more attention to the historical facts of the Marañones Rebellion. Simón included all three of the letters purported to have been written by Aguirre, inserted several of his speeches as recorded by the Ex-Marañones, and did acknowledge Orsúa's failures at command. Interestingly, whereas many of the second-generation chroniclers had presented Doña Inés' relationship with Orsúa in a romantic and tragic sense, Simón reinterpreted the character of Doña Inés in a much harsher way, presenting her as having entranced Orsúa and thus partially responsible for the expedition's failure. Overall, his work covered all the major episodes of the expedition and rebellion and Simón remained a relatively trustworthy narrator

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, xxxviii

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, xxxix

throughout. As such, his work was one of the first to examine Aguirre in a more historically truthful sense. Nonetheless, it is still important to note that Simón's portrayal of Aguirre was far from flattering or purely objective, as the author did frame the overall narrative as a tale of moralistic struggle in which Aguirre was the main villain.

Throughout *Noticias Historiales*, Simón repeatedly refers to Aguirre as a 'tyrant, traitor, madman, enemy of good and virtue, monster, and the cruel beast.' Though Simón does imbue his retelling of Aguirre's story with some degree of historical truth, his overall treatment of his legacy is nothing less than brutal, emphasizing Aguirre's evil and villainous nature. In describing Aguirre's murder of his captain Salduendo and Doña Inés, he is presented in an almost bestial and inhuman manner, with Simón writing that,

“The cruel beast Aguirre, having fed on the blood of Salduendo, now longed to shed that of Doña Inés, and, calling to mind his distaste for her, and some threats from her, he determined that she should suffer a similar punishment.”<sup>103</sup>

To best understand how Simón treated Aguirre's image in his *noticias historiales*, his final chapter which summarizes Aguirre's character and personal life gives readers a glimpse into the author's views of Aguirre. According to Simón, Aguirre's vileness and cruelty were his defining features, and he was driven by an affinity for violence and contempt of goodness and virtue. In summing up his early life, Simón makes note of Aguirre's rebellious nature claiming, “He mixed himself up in so many seditions in various parts, that he could not be tolerated in the country. He was driven from one province to another and was known as Aguirre the madman.”<sup>104</sup>

Throughout Simón's narrative, Aguirre is presented as the antithesis of a good Christian or Spaniard, and it is difficult to find a page throughout *Noticias Historiales* in which Aguirre is not

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 87

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 233

condemned or presented in a villainous manner. In writing on Aguirre and vilifying his image, Simón followed the overall trend of repurposing Aguirre's story as a moralizing tale though he did strive to imbue the overall narrative with a greater sense of historical truth. To some degree, Simón acknowledges the failures of Orsúa as well as the dire situation of the expedition prior to Aguirre's mutiny.

His own moral judgments and religious background had a clear influence on how he structured his narrative and interpreted Aguirre. In comparing his description of Aguirre to that of Castellanos and Aguado, Simón's presentation of Aguirre is almost verbatim in how he inserted the aspect of divine and devilish interference in Aguirre's rebellion. For example, Simón refers to the Marañones as 'ministers of Satan' and he directly references Aguirre's rejection of God as a key aspect of his moral character. As presented by Simón, Aguirre's blasphemy towards God is mentioned time and time again. In referencing an episode of Aguirre's rage when one of his brigantines failed to launch, Simón noted, "This caused this most impatient being to give utterance to a thousand blasphemies and heresies against God and his saints; saying at times that if God had made the heavens for the wicked and cruel people such as he had with him, he would not go."<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, Simón seemingly infers Aguirre's awareness of his infernal condemnation after death in that he repeatedly refers to his many addresses to the Marañones in which,

"He sometimes told his men that God had heaven for those who chose to serve him, but that the earth was for the strongest arm; that he knew for certain there was no salvation, and that being in life was to be in hell; and that he could not be blacker than the crow, he would commit every species of wickedness and cruelty, so that his name might ring

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 167

throughout the earth, and even to the ninth heaven; that he would not spare prisoners for fear of hell, that belief in God alone would take anyone to heaven; that he would show Adam's will to The King of Castille, to see if he had left him as his heir to the Indies."<sup>106</sup>

Not mentioned by the Ex-Marañones, this inference of Aguirre personifying immoral and sinful behavior was based upon the earlier writings of Aguado and Castellanos and furthered by Simón's own religious background.

In presenting Aguirre as a villainous figure and emphasizing his anti-Christian behavior, Simón sought to achieve two goals. First, to ensure that his story would survive and not be forgotten by subsequent generations. This is evidenced by the sheer numbers of speeches, letters, and detailed accounts included in his chronicle. In this regard, Simón succeeded as his *Noticias Historiales* has become one of the most cited and widely read accounts of the Orsúa-Aguirre episode. Secondly, much like Aguado and Castellanos, Simón repurposed and reformed Aguirre's story into a moralistic tale of the struggle between good and evil. This is evidenced by the many references to Christianity inserted throughout the narrative and how Simón framed Aguirre as an embodiment of vice and evil. Thus, Simón stripped Aguirre of much of his historical complexity and painted him in a more simplistic manner as to allow readers to easily comprehend Simón's argument that Aguirre was totally evil and thus an example of immoral behavior.

The next of the second generation of Aguirre chroniclers was the Spanish friar Antonio Vázquez de Espinosa, who published his historical chronicle of the Indies, *Compendio y Descripción de las Indias Occidentales* in 1628. As with many other of the second-generation chroniclers, Espinosa devoted his life to the Church as a friar in the Order of the Discalced

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 231

Carmelites.<sup>107</sup> Overall, very little is known about his life though it is believed that he was born in the Spanish town of Castilleja de la Cuesta around 1570. Having received some form of proper education in Spain, Espinosa travelled to the Indies with the intent of educating indigenous populations, arriving no later than 1612. During his tenure in the Indies, Espinosa extensively travelled across the Viceroyalties of New Spain, Peru, and New Granada as well as the Caribbean and Spanish Florida. By 1622, Espinosa had returned to Spain, where he devoted much of his time to composing his historical chronicle, *Compendio y Descripción de las Indias Occidentales*. By the time of his death in 1630, Espinosa's chronicle was unfinished and as such was never published during his lifetime. Overall, Espinosa's *Compendio y Descripción de las Indias Occidentales* was an intensive account of the history and culture of the Indies. It contained extensive documentation of the indigenous flora and fauna, an in-depth survey of colonial mining practices, surveys of many colonial cities which he visited, as well as an extensive description of the colonial and ecclesiastical administration of the Indies. Espinosa outlines his main motivations behind writing his chronicle: to provide "a bit of everything for the reader's entertainment"<sup>108</sup> and a selection of "stories for dessert."<sup>109</sup> Thus, Espinosa's chronicle seemed to serve as a comprehensive collection of eyewitness testimonies collected by the author, as well as his own, and a collection of historical stories of the conquest.

In regard to Aguirre, Espinosa seemed to have shown a keen interest in the Marañones Rebellion, devoting several extended chapters to it. Espinosa references Aguirre multiple times throughout his overall narrative and Espinosa's own travel movements seems to have influenced how he placed Aguirre into his larger chronicle. For example, in discussing Aguirre's attack on

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<sup>107</sup> Jay, *Sins, Crimes, and Retribution*, 79

<sup>108</sup> Espinosa, *Compendio y Descripción De Las Indias Occidentales*, 96

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 12

Margarita Island, Espinosa preceded his account with a discussion of the founding and settlement of Margarita Island, before immediately transitioning to recounting Aguirre's attack on the island. Similarly, his account of Aguirre's campaign across the mainland was likely compiled during the author's own time spent in the region as it followed a similar structure of being placed within a larger chapter focusing on the region itself. It is important to note that nowhere in his chronicle does Espinosa claim to be a historian, or state that his work is a historical chronicle, and he treats Aguirre's story as a unique event disconnected from the larger history of the conquest. In regard to Aguirre, Espinosa claims to have relied upon eyewitness accounts collected during his travels across New Granada and cites one source as being especially important to his respective account, that of Captain Altamirano, a claimed Ex-Marañon. However, any mention of a Captain Altamirano is not evident in either the accounts of the Ex-Marañones or other second-generation chroniclers, so his account may have been the fabrication of Espinosa himself to grant his own narrative a sense of authenticity.

Overall Espinosa's account follows all the major episodes of the expedition and rebellion and portrays Aguirre in a villainous and almost animalistic light, repeatedly referring to him as 'the inhuman tyrant,' 'cruel despot,' and 'evil monster.' Furthermore, Espinosa also inserts the demonic influence aspect to his own version, directly implicating the Devil in having guided and protected Aguirre. In describing Aguirre's role in the murder of Orsúa, he wrote,

“it was the last-named (Aguirre) who now tyrannized all with his perfidious scheming, for the devil, seeing we were on the point of gaining possession of so many blind nations, then under his control in those wide regions, entered, like another Judas into the traitor's

heart making him his instrument to kill the general and making it possible for him to take unrightful control on Satan's behalf."<sup>110</sup>

Essentially, Espinosa transforms Aguirre's rebellion into the act of The Devil attempting to destroy the presence of Christianity in the Indies. Repeatedly, throughout the narrative, Espinosa inserts his own commentary on Aguirre's acts such as in referencing the abandonment of the Peruvian porters at the mouth of the amazon,

"it is impossible to describe the great suffering of these Indians, all Christians and service personnel from Peru, who cried to heaven, shedding tears, for they were now exposed to cruel cannibals, the notorious Caribs, the eaters of human flesh."<sup>111</sup>

In recounting the incidents on Margarita Island and mainland Venezuela, Aguirre's villainy is at the forefront of the narrative, with Espinosa granting special attention to the murder of three Dominican Friars, claiming that Aguirre's hatred of these clergymen's 'good virtue and sanctity' as his justification behind the murders. According to Espinosa, Aguirre's rebellion is only stopped as a result of divine intervention,

"The three men asked for permission to kill the wild beast, and God allowed it to happen; the accursed man, who had killed so many unshriven people, died... The execution restored peace once more in the land, for the evil monster had been removed from the earth. A fate waiting for those who tread evil paths."<sup>112</sup>

As evidenced by this quotation, Espinosa meant to use Aguirre as a means by which to warn readers of the consequences of going against the Church and to instruct them on morality through his use of Aguirre as a negative example. Overall, this account, though told through the

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<sup>110</sup> Espinosa, *Compendio y Descripción De Las Indias Occidentales*, 67

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 93

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 118-19



first-person as supposed testimony from Captain Altamirano, has all the defining features of its use as a moral teaching tool, including the explicit references to Christian teachings and the claim that Aguirre, or any who followed in his path, would suffer eternal punishment as a result. Espinosa makes no attempt to revive Aguirre's legacy and his interest in the historical figure seemingly ends as soon as he accomplished his goal of repurposing his image as a negative example of moral behavior. In placing Espinosa's account of Aguirre into his larger narrative, he seems to have included it due to the exciting nature of Aguirre's rebellion. Though by looking closer at the specific way in which Aguirre is framed by Espinosa, his underlying intent was clearly guided by interest in reusing Aguirre's legacy a negative example of moral behavior, much like a religious sermon.

The last of the second generation of Aguirre chroniclers was the Creole historian and author José de Oviedo y Baños, whose *Historia de la Conquista y Población de la Provincia de Venezuela* was the last account of Aguirre's rebellion to be published during the colonial-era. Alongside Pedro Simón's earlier *Noticias Historiales*, Oviedo y Baños' narrative would become one the most influential sources for subsequent interpretations of Lope de Aguirre and his historic rebellion. In order to understand the importance of Oviedo y Baños' work, it is first worth providing a brief overview of his life. José de Oviedo y Baños was a Creole author and politician who devoted much of his life to military service and bureaucracy. He was born in the New Granadan city of Santafé de Bogotá in 1671 into a prestigious family. Both of his parents were born in Spain. His father, Juan Antonio de Oviedo, had received a legal degree from the University of Salamanca and was appointed as a prosecutor for the Audiencia of Bogotá in 1664. However, he died shortly after the birth of José in 1672. His mother, Josefa de Baños Sotomayor, was the daughter of an Oidor in Lima, moved her family to Lima soon after the death of her

husband. In Lima, Oviedo y Baños received an informal education from his grandfather. At the age of fifteen, he was sent to live with his uncle in Caracas, where he resided for the remainder of his life. In 1690, he became a Knight of the Order of Santiago, a position likely obtained due to his uncle's influence.<sup>113</sup>

In 1698, Oviedo y Baños married Francisca Manuela de Tovar who belonged to one of Caracas' most affluent families, with whom he had ten kids. In 1699, he was elected as Alcalde Mayor in Caracas, and in 1703 later, he purchased the title of Regidor Perpetuo, though he resigned from this position later that same year. Between 1703 and 1710, Oviedo y Baños resigned from his role in bureaucracy, likely due to personal conflicts with Nicolás Eugenio de Ponte, who served as Governor of the Province of Venezuela from 1699 until 1705.<sup>114</sup> Between 1710 and 1722, Oviedo y Baños would once again serve as Alcalde Mayor in Caracas, and it was during his tenure in which he began composing his only know writings, *Historia de la Conquista y Población de la Provincia de Venezuela*, published in Madrid in 1723. Following its publication, Oviedo y Baños spent the remainder of his life in Caracas and died in 1738.<sup>115</sup>

Oviedo y Baños' *Historia* was divided into seven parts and covered the history of the conquest and settlement of the region of Venezuela from the first recording of the region by the Spanish explorers Alonso de Ojeda and Cristóbal Guerra in 1499 until 1600. Due to the time gap of roughly a century between the period which Oviedo y Baños' account covered and when it was published, it has been theorized that the Creole chronicler planned to publish a second part of his history.<sup>116</sup> However, no such narrative has been uncovered. Nonetheless, his lengthy narrative, covering roughly 600 pages, was an extensive overview of the history of Venezuela,

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<sup>113</sup> Galster, *Aguirre oder Die Willkür*, 210

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, 210

<sup>115</sup> Salmoral, *José de Oviedo y Baños*, 1

<sup>116</sup> Galster, *Aguirre oder Die Willkür*, 218

covering many aspects of its history, including the failed 1531 expedition of Ambrosius Ehinger, the rebellion of Lope de Aguirre, and the conquest of the Indigenous Cumanagotos. Regarding Aguirre, the eighteenth-century chronicler placed his story in the first chapter of his fourth book alongside the narratives of the sixteenth century Bishop Pedro de Agreda and conquistador Sancho Briceño.

Oviedo y Baños relied upon the works of earlier chroniclers such as Simón and Espinosa to compile his account, and he appeared to have copied several passages verbatim from Simón's 1628 accounts, much as Simón had done with Aguado's text a century earlier. Similarly, he also implicated the Devil as influencing Aguirre's actions, a theme directly transplanted from the earlier chronicle, which Oviedo y Baños relied upon to compile his own. However, while he does associate some of Aguirre's actions with a demonic influence, he does not implicate this theme to the extent earlier colonial chroniclers had done. His narrative is told in the third person, and his subject matter is framed as having occurred in a distant time. However, much like the interpretations of other colonial-era chroniclers, in painting a literary portrait of Aguirre, Oviedo y Baños is unsparing in his total vilification of the Basque rebel.

In recounting the expedition, Oviedo y Baños devotes only a single page to the formation and early stages of Orsúa's expedition before transitioning the focus towards Aguirre. According to the author, Aguirre immediately set about conspiring his mutiny as soon as the expedition departed. Furthermore, he claimed that Aguirre immediately began planning his mutiny upon the expedition's departure, succeeding in gaining a large army of fellow conspirators prior to the assassination of Orsúa,

“Accustomed to riots and tumults, they began at once to mount conspiracies, trying to undermine Orsúa's operation with gossip and rumors. They proceeded so cunningly that they attracted others to their side.”<sup>117</sup>

Interestingly, Oviedo y Baños explicitly notes Aguirre's silver tongue and ability to recruit such a large expedition to his side. He paints Aguirre as an experienced rebel whose intentions were always aimed toward tyranny. After recounting the murder of Guzmán, he continued,

“He then persuaded the others with ugly exhortations to change the destination of the expedition and return to Peru to take possession of that kingdom. All agreed to his infamy, some of their own free will, others through fear of Aguirre... The monster Aguirre, now free of all opposition to his designs, declared himself commander of that frightened and confused army, as Supreme Leader of the Marañones.”<sup>118</sup>

As evidenced by this passage, Oviedo y Baños interprets Aguirre's success due to his strong ability as a leader. This aspect, not present in earlier iterations, was likely driven by the authors' feelings of nationalism. This fact can be evidenced by the introduction of his work, in which Oviedo y Baños outlines his goal of providing a definitive history of the region of Venezuela. Furthermore, much like how Juan de Castellanos had praised the Spanish conquistadors some thirteen decades earlier, Oviedo y Baños is similarly praiseworthy of individuals he considered essential to the history of Venezuela.

Turning back to Aguirre, much like the earlier cronistas, Oviedo y Baños remains consistent in his total vilification of Aguirre, repeatedly referring to him as a “monster,” “tyrant,” and explicitly making a note of his “evil deeds.”<sup>119</sup> Similarly, he repeatedly notes Aguirre's fits

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<sup>117</sup> Oviedo y Baños, *The Conquest and Settlement of Venezuela*, 122 (trans. by Varner)

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 123

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 125-6

of rage in which “he would become so infuriated that he bellowed with rage and frothed at the mouth.”<sup>120</sup> Though Oviedo y Baños did not come from a religious background as earlier cronistas had, he still had a clear purpose behind his vilification of the Basque rebel. First, in vilifying Aguirre, the author sought to inflate the heroism of fellow Venezuelans. Second, much like the fellow cronistas, Oviedo y Baños also sought to repurpose Aguirre's story as a moral exemplum to instruct readers on proper behavior. This second aspect is apparent in how Oviedo y Baños presents Aguirre as becoming increasingly tyrannical as his rebellion progresses. The author makes explicit note that Aguirre's actions were immoral and evil. Oviedo y Baños includes all three of Aguirre's letters in his narrative, likely having transcribed them from the earlier chronicle of Francisco Vásquez.

Interestingly, he intentionally changes several aspects of the letters, especially Aguirre's letter to King Philip. For example, Oviedo y Baños concludes Aguirre's letter with the line, “May God protect you, excellent king, for many years.”<sup>121</sup> This line contradicts Vásquez's earlier transcription, which concluded with, “Son of your loyal Basque vassals, and I, rebel until death against you for your ingratitude.”<sup>122</sup> He likely intentionally altered this document to present Aguirre's actions as seemingly without meaning and driven by his insanity (what rebel would swear allegiance to the very ruler whom he was actively rebelling against). Following his inclusion of Aguirre's letter to King Philip, Oviedo y Baños states that “The content of this letter us the most obvious proof of Aguirre's rustic and gross nature and of the disrespect to which his shameless insolence extended.”<sup>123</sup> Throughout his narrative, Oviedo y Baños devotes several extended passages to recounting Aguirre's many brutal murders in which the author claims that

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 127

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 147

<sup>122</sup> Vasquez, *El Dorado: Cronica De La Expedición De Pedro De Ursua y Lope De Aguirre*, 69

<sup>123</sup> Oviedo y Baños, *The Conquest and Settlement of Venezuela*, 147

the Basque rebel took seeming pleasure in his deeds. In recounting the murder of the Marañon Alonso Rodríguez by Aguirre following his departure from Margarita Island, he wrote,

“The tyrant burned with ire and, grasping his sword, cut off one of Rodríguez's arms with a single slash. His anger still not satisfied; he ordered his victim stabbed to death so that one more example would remain on the beach as a token of his cruelty.”<sup>124</sup>

For the remainder of his narrative, Oviedo y Baños paints Aguirre as increasingly paranoid and reckless in how he acted. He devotes the remainder of his narrative to recounting Aguirre's many evil deeds, which he committed across the Venezuelan mainland before arriving at Barquisimeto. By the time in which the majority of his men desert the Royalist side, Oviedo y Baños presents Aguirre as having descended into madness and tyranny, concluding his narrative with a summary of the murder of Elvira,

“Eager to culminate his cruelties with one too heinous to characterize even a beast, he set the cord in his harquebus and told his daughter to commend herself to God, for he was going to kill her to save her from the affront of ever thereafter hearing herself called the daughter of a tyrant. La Torralva grasped the weapon and pleaded to dissuade him from so execrable an evil; but inflexible in his resolution, he released the harquebus and, drawing a dagger from his belt, stabbed his daughter to death.”<sup>125</sup>

Having committed this final act of murder, for which Oviedo y Baños repeatedly denounces, the author briefly notes Aguirre's death before concluding his recounting with an overview of Aguirre's life prior to his rebellion and a literary portrait of the rebel. Much like the cronistas before him, Oviedo y Baños made explicit note of the sheer extent of Aguirre's villainy and, in recounting his death, made similar note of the lasting impressions of the Basque rebel's actions,

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 134

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 156

“Thus ended the grim tyranny of Lope de Aguirre, who held all the provinces of America in terror. Though he was brought down by more trickery than strength, Venezuela was credited in other countries with the triumph of his death. When he went out with Orsúa on the conquest of Omagua, he led his own rebellion so that, at the cost of much blood inhumanely shed, the memory of his barbarous impiety remained eternal, and he was distinguished as a beast among men.”<sup>126</sup>

This passage shows that Oviedo y Baños' interpretation of Aguirre's demise and downfall differed significantly from those of the earlier cronistas. Whereas Aguado and Simon had attributed Aguirre's death as a result of divine retribution, Oviedo y Baños instead credited his death as an act of Venezuela, exemplifying the influence of the author's nationalistic sentiments and thus how he sought to repurpose Aguirre's story as a means by which to elegize Venezuela's history. Furthermore, much like the earlier cronistas, he also repurposed Aguirre as a moral exemplum, explicitly noting that readers should view Aguirre's actions as evil and immoral. Although his account was written after a roughly one-century hiatus in Aguirre's legacy, in reappropriating the story of Aguirre, Oviedo y Baños likely sought similar goals of earlier cronistas and was similarly unanimous in his complete vilification of Aguirre.

Though the overall goal of these chroniclers was to ensure that Aguirre's story was preserved, his story persisted during the era due to the authors finding a keen interest in his narrative as being particularly noteworthy. In each of these larger chronicles, Aguirre is seemingly placed alongside similarly interesting historical accounts as well as the authors' own analyses of the Indies. The second-generation of Aguirre chroniclers unanimously depicted Aguirre as a villain, lacking all goodness and virtue. By doing so, they sought to repurpose his

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 158

legacy as a negative example of immoral behavior to instruct readers on how not to act. Each of these cronistas intentionally highlighted aspects of Aguirre which personified sinful behavior to accomplish this. As evidenced by the collective religious backgrounds of these authors and the shared similarities in how they distorted the accounts of the Ex-Marañones, the second-generation of Aguirre chroniclers had a clear agenda in their universal condemnation of Aguirre's legacy. The repurposing of his legacy and story as a moralistic teaching tool for readers as evidenced by the insertion of canonical ideals and reconfiguring the Marañones Rebellion into one aimed at attacking all goodness and virtue in the Indies, as opposed to its historical objective of overthrowing the colonial government. It is important to note that these narratives, especially that of Pedro Simón, have persisted as invaluable sources for subsequent generations' attempts to reconstruct Aguirre's complex legacy. As such, the original objective of these chroniclers in ensuring that the Orsúa-Aguirre episode would not be forgotten, as ensuing chapters will show. However, following Espinosa's account, subsequent reinterpretations and retellings of Aguirre's story remained relatively infrequent. It would be roughly a century until the next boom in interest surrounding Aguirre would arise; this time, the unredeemable villain would be reborn as Latin America's first revolutionary and hero.



#### **Chapter 4: Aguirre the Revolutionary (1770-1899)**

As evidenced by the writings of the Ex-Marañones and colonial cronistas of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Lope de Aguirre was universally condemned as tyrannical, mad, and demonic following his death by the Ex-Marañones and colonial cronistas. Whether driven by their interests in self-exculpation or repurposing Aguirre's image as a moralistic tale of sin, these Aguirre chroniclers showed little interest in examining the Basque rebel's life beyond the many cruelties he committed in his campaign through the Amazon, on Margarita Island, and across Venezuela. By solely relying on these interpretations, it would be easy to assume that Aguirre has been perpetually condemned as a villain from his death in 1561 until the present day.

However, views of the Basque rebel underwent a dramatic transformation during the nineteenth century, when he began to be redeemed as an early example of a Latin American revolutionary.

In essence, Lope de Aguirre was reinvented as a Latin American figure whose sixteenth-century rebellion was reappropriated to represent nineteenth-century society's widespread social and political anxieties, particularly in South America (and more especially in Venezuela). Whereas the Ex-Marañones and colonial cronistas viewed Aguirre's rebellion mainly as an act of madness or evil and as having no concrete ideological goals beyond simple bloodlust, those of the nineteenth century heavily imbued Aguirre's rebellion with notions of Latin American identity and nationalist rebellion. It is important to note that despite attempts to redeem specific aspects of Aguirre's legacy, namely his rebellion, a complete historical redemption would not occur until the twentieth century and portrayals of Aguirre during this period still painted him as a villain for the most part.

During the nineteenth century, iterations of Aguirre's rebellion lost their religious references and moralizing purposes, which were central to the characterizations produced by the sixteenth-and-seventeenth-century cronistas. Instead, his story was reconfigured into a tale of the clash between the established and subverted orders as Aguirre became a symbol of anti-colonial resistance and thus embodying the widespread social and political upheaval occurring across the globe during the nineteenth century. Furthermore, this era witnessed Aguirre's legacy gaining widespread interest outside the Hispanic world, specifically in parts of Europe, through writers such as Alexander von Humboldt, Robert Southey, and William Bollaert. It is important to note that individuals during this period continued to present a villainous iteration of Aguirre for the most part.

The authors and individuals who reinterpreted Aguirre as in essence a Latin American icon during the nineteenth century analyzed in this chapter are: Simón Bolívar as reported in the works of Luis Perú de Lacroix's *Diario de Bucaramanga* (1828) and Manuel Pérez Villa's *Vida de Daniel Florencio O'Leary, Primer Edecán del Libertador* (1957), Andrés Bello's *Resumen de la Historia de Venezuela* (1810), Rafael María Baralt's *Resumen de la Historia de Venezuela* (1830), Miguel Tejera's *Venezuela Pintoresca* (1871), Robert Southey's *The Expedition of Orsúa and The Crimes of Aguirre* (1821), and Aristides Rojas's *Orígenes Venezolanos* (1876). These authors and individuals effectively repurposed Aguirre as a Latin American icon and, influenced by the global revolutions of the period, emphasized his main characteristic as a revolutionary, albeit still a villainous one. This chapter will show that Aguirre's image was reinvented as a uniquely Latin American figure in history and fiction during the nineteenth century. The authors who repurposed Aguirre's story during this century pursued varying goals, whether to appropriate him as Latin America's first revolutionary, repurpose his story to fit into

the context of nineteenth-century society, or to establish the importance of Aguirre to Latin American history and culture. Thus, during this period of widespread revolution and social upheaval, Aguirre's legacy underwent a dramatic reinterpretation and partial redemption as increasingly liberal and revolutionary ideas swept across the globe during the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions, and the Latin American Wars of Independence.

In explaining how Aguirre was transformed into a Latin American figure and proto-revolutionary, it is important to give context to the period in which these works were produced. Beginning in the late-eighteenth century and influenced by Enlightenment ideals of liberty and freedom and a growing revolutionary fervor, the period witnessed a series of successful wars of independence across the globe. The American Revolution, lasting from 1775 to 1783, was the first anticolonial struggle to succeed. News of the North American colonies' successes soon spread across the American and European continents, inspiring similar revolutionary fervor and the subsequent French Revolution and Haitian War of Independence. These uprisings found similar success in achieving their revolutionary goals.

Regarding Aguirre, the Latin American wars of Independence, which spanned from 1808 until 1826, had the largest impact on how his legacy was reappropriated. A combination of long-standing tensions between America's peninsular and creole populations, news of the Haitian and French Revolutions, and the weakening of the Spanish Empire's power during the Peninsular War resulted in a growing number of *Libertadores* pushing for Spanish American regions to establish an autonomous government, devoid of Spanish oversight. It is important to note that, unlike the North American War of Independence, the revolts in Central and South America occurred as separate revolutions, with multiple starting points. In South America, the push for independence was primarily headed by the *Libertadores* Simón Bolívar and José de San Martín.

From 1809 until the mid-1820s, Bolívar and San Martín succeeded in gaining in their home regions of Venezuela and Argentina before embarking on a larger independence campaign across the rest of South America, defeating the final loyalist force in 1826.

Following Spain's loss of its mainland American colonies, the former Spanish America was divided into more than a dozen individual nations. The newly formed Latin American nations, particularly Venezuela and Chile, sought to jettison their colonial past, form a unique national identity, and write a new history. Amid this push for independence, most notable in Venezuela, plus a subsequent push to establish a uniquely Latin American identity, Lope de Aguirre was rediscovered and repurposed as a revolutionary icon.

Interestingly, one of the first to appropriate Aguirre's legacy during the nineteenth century was *El Libertador* himself, Simón Bolívar, who, according to historical accounts, reportedly envisioned Aguirre as one of Latin America's first revolutionaries, despite no such concept of Latin American independence or identity being present in Aguirre's 1561 rebellion. Perhaps the best evidence of Bolívar's redemptions of Aguirre as a forerunner to Latin American independence and patriotism can be found in Luis Perú de Lacroix's 1828 historical biography of Bolívar, *Diario de Bucaramanga*. Lacroix, a French general turned advisor to Bolívar, composed his *Diario* based on his experiences serving under Bolívar during the wars of independence in the 1820s. Told from the author's perspective, this source reads much like a personal journal. Although his fleeting mention of Bolívar's seeming affinity for Aguirre can be considered hearsay, the fact that Lacroix mentioned Aguirre signifies his importance in Venezuela during the revolutionary period. The nature of this source as primary and the objective account provided throughout Lacroix's accounts grants his claims a reasonable degree of credence. In recounting a dinner with Bolívar, Lacroix stated,

“The Libertador's good humor continued throughout the meal. He varied the conversation many times and even told us part of the history of Lope de Aguirre and his death, choosing the most interesting and heroic passages and features. The heroic deeds are told by The Libertador with much interest and much fire, and they are the ones he likes most.”<sup>127</sup>

As evidenced by this passage, Bolívar seems to have intentionally redeemed Aguirre's rebellion as a forerunner to his own and likely envisioned himself as a successor to Aguirre's vision. This is evident in the several parallels shared between the two: both Bolívar and Aguirre were of Basque descent, became harsh critics of Spain's colonial administration and its corruption, and most importantly, both openly declared their rejection of their allegiance to the Spanish Crown. This last point is further evidenced in claims that Bolívar paid particular attention to Aguirre's letter to King Philip II of Spain, reportedly referring to it as 'The First Act of the Independence of America in the Year 1560.'<sup>128</sup>

Bolívar also purportedly ordered that the letter be published in the Venezuelan town of Maracaibo during his military campaign across the region. Indeed, several similarities can be seen in Aguirre's letter to King Philip and Bolívar's 1812 Cartagena Manifesto. Both documents criticize the Spanish colonial government as corrupt and inefficient. Like Aguirre, Bolívar denounces peninsular judges as keeping the region “in continual turmoil and to foster whatever conspiracies our judges permitted them to organize, by always acquitting them even when their misdeeds were of such enormity as to endanger public welfare.”<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, this letter follows a similar informal and somewhat rambling rhetoric akin to Aguirre's earlier letter,

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<sup>127</sup> Lacroix, *Diario de Bucaramanga*, 76

<sup>128</sup> Perez Villa, *Vida de Daniel Florencio O'Leary, Primer Edecán del Libertador*, 40

<sup>129</sup> Bolívar, *Cartagena Manifesto* (trans. by author)

bolstering Pérez Villa's claim that The Liberator found a degree of inspiration in Aguirre's earlier rebellion.

Though Bolívar seems to have tried to redeem Aguirre as a forerunner of Latin American independence, the appropriation of his legacy presents a high degree of channeling and selectively choosing aspects of Aguirre to best represent his intent. Indeed, Bolívar only goes so far as to reproduce Aguirre's revolutionary fervor and desire for independence from the Spanish Crown, seemingly making no note of the many atrocities committed during the Marañones Rebellion. Thus, Bolívar seems to have been attracted to Aguirre's legacy only in order to justify his own revolution and thus he reframed Aguirre to fit the context of the nineteenth century, seemingly showing little interest in his status as a historical figure with all of his complexities.

Regarding Aguirre's treatment during the nineteenth century, the case of Simón Bolívar seems to be unique in how he sought to redeem him. For most other writers of the century, interpretations of Aguirre appear to have remained entrenched in the sixteenth and seventeenth-century visions of him being a villain or immoral character. However, these interpretations also adhered to Bolívar's notion of Aguirre being a Latin American, as will be seen in the remainder of this chapter.

Two Venezuelan historians and politicians, Andrés Bello and Rafael María Baralt, incorporated Aguirre's story into their respective books on the history of Venezuela, both named *Resumen de la Historia de Venezuela*. Both authors were natives of Venezuela, participating in the region's struggle for independence, and proved instrumental in establishing a unique Venezuelan and Latin American identity through their extensive writings. Born in Caracas in 1781, Andrés Bello was an accomplished author and politician. Having studied at the University of Venezuela, he was an acquaintance of Alexander von Humboldt and an early instructor of

Simón Bolívar.<sup>130</sup> In 1810, he was sent on a diplomatic mission by Bolívar to London, serving as the Secretary of the Legislature of Chile and Colombia for nineteen years. In his free time, Bello wrote an extensive collection of poems and books concerning the history and culture of Latin America. His 1841 book, *Grammatica de la Lingua Castellana*, was considered one of the most important accounts of the Spanish language for several decades following its publication. Returning to the Americas in 1829, Bello spent his final thirty-six years in Chile, where he played an instrumental role in drafting the Civil Code of The Republic of Chile and the founding of the nation's first university. In 1865, he died in Santiago de Chile.<sup>131</sup>

Bello wrote about the Basque rebel in his 1810 historical account, *Resumen de la Historia de Venezuela*. This book was never completed in Bello's lifetime, though it was eventually published as a forty-page manuscript in the twentieth century. Detailing the history of the region of Venezuela from the conquest until the early nineteenth century, Bello placed Aguirre into his narration of the exploits of Francisco Fajardo, a mestizo conquistador active during Aguirre's 1561 rebellion. In accordance, Bello wrote,

“Because his presence was ordered by the Governor Pablo Collado to contain the atrocities committed in all the towns of Venezuela by the criminal Lope de Aguirre, to whom history has improperly given the epithet of tyrant. This monster vomited out by the turbulences of Peru had gone down the Marañon River, and after ravaging Margarita, passed to Borburata, and from there to Barquisimeto, marking all of his steps with extermination and desolation; until he died in this city at the hands of that Paredes who had founded Truxillo, accrediting in his last moments the ferocity that had distinguished

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<sup>130</sup> Galster, *Aguirre oder Die Willkür*, 254

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 255

all of his life. The Spanish were very weakened by the persecution of Aguirre, and Fajardo was more so than anyone.”<sup>132</sup>

As evidenced by this passage, Bello conformed to the colonial-era view of Aguirre as a monster and evil figure, though he does argue that he was not a tyrant. This aspect of Bello's interpretation of Aguirre is interesting. Much like Bolívar, Bello likely saw similarities between the contemporary Latin American Independence movement and Aguirre's earlier Marañones Rebellion.

Nonetheless, his depiction of the Rebel in a villainous light shows that he did not attempt to resuscitate Aguirre's legacy to the degree of Bolívar. Regardless, the mere inclusion of Aguirre's story into Bello's compressed history of Venezuela is particularly significant in showing that Aguirre was viewed as an important figure in Venezuela's history and not just as a unique case of evil as presented by the sixteenth-century cronistas. As the goal of Bello in writing his *Resumen* was to compile a history of Venezuela, Aguirre's incorporation signifies how he was viewed as an important figure in the region's history and culture.

In an equivalent manner, Rafael María Baralt, in his similarly named historical account, *Resumen de la Historia de Venezuela Desde el Año de 1797 Hasta el de 1830*, shows a similar affinity for Aguirre as an important character in Venezuela's history and culture. Born in 1810 in the Venezuelan city of Maracaibo, Baralt had a similar background to that of Bello as an accomplished diplomat and historian.<sup>133</sup> Baralt spent his youth in Santo Domingo before returning to Venezuela to accompany the Venezuelan general Santiago Mariño on his 1821 military expedition as a chronicler. Furthermore, he worked in Venezuela's revolutionary government and assisted in the writing of Agustín Codazzi's 1841 *Resumen de la Geografía de*

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<sup>132</sup> Bello, *Resumen de la Historia de Venezuela*, 63

<sup>133</sup> Galster, *Aguirre oder Die Willkür*, 255



*Venezuela*. In 1841, Baralt permanently settled in Spain, devoting his time to extensively writing on the history and culture of Venezuela and serving in several academic and administrative posts until he died in 1861.<sup>134</sup> Baralt's *Resumen de la Historia de Venezuela* detailed the overall history of Venezuela in a fashion akin to that of Bello.

Regarding Aguirre, Baralt provided a brief narrative of his rebellion, seemingly transcribing verbatim from the earlier account of Oviedo y Baños. Baralt directly comments on his appropriation of Oviedo's narrative, and his description of Aguirre matches those of the earlier cronistas, painting Aguirre as a

“restless and seditious man, of an incomparable ferocity, that bordered on frenzy... his person, says Oviedo, was very contemptible, for being ugly, small-faced, very small in body, pale in the flesh, greatly talkative, boisterous and a charlatan. Well, if he was as ugly as Oviedo says, much uglier we must consider the soul if for the honor of humanity, we do not attribute in part in the disturbances of his undoing the unheard-of crimes that tainted his life.”<sup>135</sup>

Overall, Baralt seems to have directly copied Oviedo's earlier narrative, contributing little to reinterpreting Aguirre's image. However, Baralt's concluding remarks on Aguirre, which appear to be his own, provide an interesting insight into how his legacy was perceived in nineteenth-century Latin America: “Thus, Lope de Aguirre died on 27 October 1561, leaving such memories on earth, which in his lamentable story, even to this day is a favorite subject of Jácaras songs [Spanish theatrical songs, often accompanied by dancing] and popular

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 257

<sup>135</sup> Baralt, *Resumen de la Historia de Venezuela*, 214

proverbs.”<sup>136</sup> As evidenced by this, by the time of Baralt's account, Aguirre had already been ingrained in Venezuelan society as an almost mythical and legendary figure.

Some three decades after the works of Baralt and Bello appeared in print, Venezuelan geographer Miguel Tejera similarly reconfigured Aguirre's legacy, perhaps accentuating his status as a revolutionary even further. Like, Baralt and Bello, Tejero was a Venezuelan-born author who published a book discussing the history and culture of Venezuela. Published in 1871, his book, *Venezuela Pintoresca e Ilustrada: Relación Histórica (Desde el Describimiento de la America Hasta 1870), Geografía, Estadística Comercial E Industria; Usos, Costumbres y Literatura Nacional*, covered a wide array of subjects pertaining to Venezuela including its history, geography, society, and literature.<sup>137</sup> Regarding Aguirre, Tejera included a brief four-page account of his rebellion into his chapter discussing the emancipation of Venezuela. In doing so, Tejera placed the rebellion of Aguirre alongside that of Bolívar and painted an almost romantic picture of the Venezuelan region, which played host to Aguirre's rebellion some four centuries earlier. In introducing his retelling of Aguirre's rebellion, Tejera wrote of the

“glorious sites that witnessed the great battle that came to definitively decide the emancipation of Venezuela, rooting out the bloody and cruel domination that for more than three hundred years had oppressed the immense region of Costa Firme.”<sup>138</sup>

Overall, Tejera's recounting of Aguirre's rebellion paints the Basque Rebel in a villainous light, referring to him as 'the tyrant' and 'that criminal adventurer' and repeatedly referencing his immense thirst for blood and as “a man with a depraved soul and a heart hardened in the practice of cruelty, one of the beings of whom it can be truly said that he had no known virtue.”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 219

<sup>137</sup> Galster, *Aguirre oder Die Willkür*, 261

<sup>138</sup> Tejera, *Venezuela Pintoresca E Ilustrada*, 207

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 208

However, despite this condemnation of Aguirre's character, which is reminiscent of the sixteenth-century cronistas, Tejera also praised Aguirre's "extraordinary perseverance and courage"<sup>140</sup> and paid particular attention to his "proclamation of independence of the country (Venezuela) and the deposition of Philip II."<sup>141</sup>

Tejera places Aguirre as a direct predecessor to the subsequent independence movement of Venezuela and an individual whose rebellion was aimed at achieving independence for Spanish America. Tejera concluded his short description of Aguirre's rebellion with only brief mention of his death at Barquisimeto before transitioning to discussing the role of Barquisimeto as a witness to the country's many revolutions. Overall, Miguel Tejera's *Venezuela Pintoresca e Ilustrada* aimed to create a historical background from which Venezuela could formulate a unique identity. Aguirre's inclusion in his narrative as a predecessor to the nineteenth-century independence movements signifies that Aguirre was considered an important historical figure during this era. He was also reconfigured to be a revolutionary and arguably patriotic icon by these authors.

Indeed, Aguirre's legacy and entrenchment in Latin American culture were evident outside the Spanish-speaking world. Perhaps one of the best examples of how Aguirre's legacy was repurposed to fit into the context of the social and political anxieties of the nineteenth century came from Robert Southey, an English romantic poet whose 1821 historical narrative, *The Expedition of Orsua; and The Crimes of Aguirre*, was one of the first English-language retellings of Aguirre's rebellion. Southey, who had earlier co-written a play, *The Fall of Robespierre*, that criticized the French revolutionary as a tyrant, seemingly framed his

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 209

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 209

subsequent historical retelling of the Orsúa-Aguirre episode to parallel the ideas of the French Revolution.

Southey was born in 1774 in the English city of Bristol and received an education at Westminster School and Balliol College of Oxford. He was a leader of the English Romantic movement, alongside Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth.<sup>142</sup> Southey was an avid supporter of the French Revolution and a liberal school of thought in his youth, though he gradually became more conservative later in life. In the early nineteenth century, Southey gained an affinity for the history of the Iberian world, devoting several years to composing a book, *History of Brazil*, which he never saw through completion. However, his chapter on the Orsúa-Aguirre episode, which was not included in his book, would subsequently be published in 1821 in the *Edinburgh Register* as a standalone historical narrative. In 1813, Southey was appointed as poet laureate, spending the remainder of his life composing an extensive canon of poetry and prose discourse and dying in 1843 in London.<sup>143</sup> Though a strong supporter of the revolution in his youth, Southey became increasingly opposed to liberal and revolutionary ideas later in life, devoting several poems and historical narratives to critiquing the events in France.

Southey recontextualized Aguirre's 1561 rebellion to parallel the French Revolution, treating both revolutions as acts of tyrants and depicting Aguirre in a villainous manner. In *The Expedition of Orsua; and The Crimes of Aguirre*, Southey directly compared Aguirre's rebellion to many subsequent revolutions against autocratic monarchies, citing them all as villainous events. In his introduction, Southey wrote,

“It is a frightful, but salutary story; exemplifying that power, which intoxicates weak men, makes wicked ones mad. This is an important truth and has not been sufficiently

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<sup>142</sup> Nesvets, *Robert Southey*, 120

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 122

observed, but as the first part of the maxim is proved by Rienzi and Massaniello, so is the second by the fanatics of Cromwell's age, and the monsters of the French Revolution, as well as by the history of the Eastern despots and Roman emperors. The pressure of the atmosphere is not more necessary for the animal life of men, than the restraint of law and order is for his moral being.”<sup>144</sup>

This extended passage shows that Southey saw several connections between Aguirre's 1561 rebellion and subsequent historical revolutions. Southey condemns Aguirre as a vicious tyrant, though he heavily emphasizes his seeming fascination with the notion of liberty. According to Southey's retelling, Aguirre boldly proclaimed, 'LIBERTY! LIBERTY!'<sup>145</sup> upon Orsúa's assassination and proudly displayed his body to serve as a reminder of what would happen to so-called tyrants. This inclusion, not found in the writings of the Ex-Marañones and cronistas, was likely inserted by Southey to infer a similarity between Orsúa's death and those of King Charles I during the English Civil War and of Louis XVI during the French Revolution, where the former monarchs' bodies were publicly displayed following their execution. Southey also seemingly repaints Aguirre as a figure who, though still villainous and tyrannical, was driven by a fascination with the notions of liberty and freedom. It is important to note that Southey emphasizes that Aguirre's conception of freedom was not one that the author advocated. This is evidenced by Southey's mentioning Aguirre's animosity towards religious brothers, writing, “They were to kill all the Dominicans and Franciscans, and all other Religiousers of every order except Mercedarian, because he said, they opposed the liberty of the soldiers.”<sup>146</sup> Unlike the cronistas who had painted Aguirre's animosity towards religious orders as an act of

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<sup>144</sup> Southey, *The Expedition of Orsua; and The Crimes of Aguirre*, viii

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, 82

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, 175

demonic influence, Southey reconfigured it to represent an attempt by Aguirre to attack established institutions akin to the dissolution of the French Monarchy and anticlerical campaigns during the French Revolution. Thus, Southey reconfigured Aguirre's legacy to reflect his own fears of the widespread revolutions occurring during the early nineteenth century. To accomplish this, he reconfigured and reinterpreted several aspects of Aguirre's historical rebellion to parallel those rebellions of the nineteenth century.

Furthermore, Robert Southey explicitly connects Aguirre to the history of Latin America, making specific references to his place in the history of the region and its cultural identity. Southey refers to Aguirre's lasting memory in the regions of Venezuela and Colombia and cites an earlier report by the famed German scientist Alexander von Humboldt, who noted a mythification of Aguirre by residents of Venezuela into a spirit-like figure. In his conclusion, Southey wrote,

“Aguirre's crime made a deep impression upon the people of Venezuela. There was something marked as well as monstrous in his character. The rebellion was better remembered for its wild and unconnected nature; and because no dramatic fable has been brought to a more distinct and tragic catastrophe. Aguirre is still spoken of in those countries by the name of El Tyrano... the tyrant; and it is the belief of the people that his spirit, as restless now as when it animated his body, still wanders over the scenes of his guilt, in the form of that fiery vapor which is frequently seen in the island of Margarita, and in the Llanos, or plains of New Andalusia. Moreover, this visible but intangible phenomenon is called in those countries, to this day, the Soul of the Tyrant.”<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 215

The notion of Aguirre as a wandering spirit during the nineteenth century was widely reported by both Venezuelan and European authors such as Ramón Páez and Alexander von Humboldt. Indeed, This mythification of Aguirre was recorded within Margarita society as early as the sixteenth century by the colonial era chroniclers Pedro Simón and José de Oviedo y Baños. Perhaps most notably, In 1799, the German naturalist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt, who visited Margarita Island during his 5-year voyage across the Americas, recorded a similar superstitious belief of 'The Soul of the Tyrant,' whom Margaritans accused of appearing in the form of a reddish flame at night and attacked those who were unfortunate enough to encounter the spirit,

"The people on Margarita Island call these reddish flames by the singular name of The Soul of The Tyrant, imagining that the spectre of Lope de Aguirre, harassed by remorse wanders over these countries sullied by his crimes. When the people of Cumana, and the island of Margarita, pronounce the words 'El Tirana,' it is always to denote the infamous Lope de Aguirre.<sup>148</sup>"

Humboldt gives a scientific explanation for this surprising phenomenon, being a release of marsh gases. However, as evidenced by this passage, the residents of Margarita repurposed the memory of Lope de Aguirre and his crimes to explain this phenomenon and, in turn, repurposed the memory of Aguirre's bloody rebellion into a means by which to explain the unexplainable and uphold villainous connotation of the name Aguirre. Aguirre's incorporation into Margarita myth-making and superstitious tradition has been recorded in the twentieth century, and into the modern era, his name continued to evoke a villainous meaning amongst Margaritans.

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<sup>148</sup> Humboldt, *Personal Narrative*, 164

As evidenced by this, the legacy of Lope de Aguirre persisted as an important cultural referent to those individuals who inhabit modern-day Venezuela. Overall, Robert Southey's iteration of Aguirre was recontextualized as a means by which Southey could critique the French Revolution and the liberal schools of thought it was inspiring across the globe. Thus, he had an apparent reason to vilify Aguirre and accentuate his revolutionary characteristics, albeit in a defaming manner. This work shows that while Aguirre's revolutionary tendencies were essential to the nineteenth-century depiction of the Basque Rebel, each author imbued their respective intentions into his character, and they did not universally praise Aguirre's Revolution.

The final nineteenth-century author who wrote on Aguirre and is worth mentioning is the Venezuelan-born physician and historian Arístides Rojas. Born in 1826 in the Venezuelan capital of Caracas, Rojas was introduced to Venezuela's political and intellectual elites at an early age by his father. He became a physician, having studied at the University of Caracas and abroad. Rojas showed a keen interest in science during his lifetime, publishing an extensive array of treatises on seismology, geology, and other scientific fields concerning Venezuela.<sup>149</sup> In his later life, Rojas abandoned his career as a physician to focus on recording the history and origins of Venezuela, most notably in his books, *El Elemento Vasco en la Historia de Venezuela* and *Orígenes Venezolanos (Historia, Tradiciones, Crónicas y Leyendas)*, published in 1874 and 1876, respectively. Until his death in 1894 in Caracas, Rojas published an impressive collection of historical texts chronicling the history of Venezuela. He was posthumously referred to as the founder of professional research in Venezuela.<sup>150</sup>

Rojas devoted an extended monograph to Aguirre and his rebellion in his *Orígenes Venezolanos*, which compiled his earlier works (*El Elemento Vasco* and *Estudios Indígenas*). In

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<sup>149</sup> Galster, *Aguirre oder Die Willkür*, 262

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, 264



writing this historical chronicle, Rojas outlined his goal of establishing a collective history of Venezuela and its origins. Interestingly, he paid particular attention to the role of the Basque peoples in the Spanish conquest of the Americas and in the Wars of Latin American Independence. In describing the Basque peoples, Rojas extolled the Basques' thirst for independence and heroism. In tracing the overall history of the Basque peoples in Venezuela, only Lope de Aguirre and Simón Bolívar received comprehensive treatment detailing their lives and characteristics. Rojas placed these characters in a larger section discussing the history of rebellion and independence in Venezuela.

Regarding Aguirre, Rojas seems to have relied upon the earlier accounts of Pedro Simón and Oviedo y Baños to compile a general narrative of his rebellion, including his commentary on Aguirre and the events of the rebellion. Though presenting Aguirre as a villain and cruel man, Rojas repeatedly notes his leadership abilities and revolutionary characteristics. Transitioning from an overview of Isla Margarita, Rojas introduced his section on Aguirre, writing,

“That legendary, incomprehensible, ferocious being, whom tradition knows by the name of the Tyrant Aguirre ... the prototype of the dramatic adventurers of that era full of episode that opens the modern history of the genre.”<sup>151</sup>

As evidenced by this statement, Rojas placed Aguirre alongside other conquistadors, painting them as individuals whose greed led them to settle in Venezuela, further presenting them as villainous. Thus, Rojas viewed Aguirre as just another example of the Black Legend per se; he does not explicitly distinguish Aguirre's atrocities from others committed by Spanish conquistadors during the era of conquest.

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<sup>151</sup> Rojas, *Orígenes Venezolanos*, 339

Furthermore, Rojas finds a particular affinity in Aguirre's leadership ability and being able to successfully lead such a large number of men through the Amazon and across Venezuela. He interprets Aguirre as an example of an early caudillo, a Latin American military leader who rules through force and power, directly comparing him with Hernan Cortés. In describing Aguirre's characteristics as a leader and revolutionary, Rojas wrote:

“This expedition of adventurers whose chief (Aguirre) is a man as fierce as he is daring, a certain stamp of greatness and misery... like another Cortés, he burns his ships and another boat that was in the port of Borburata, and encouraging his soldiers, he gave orders to march in the direction of Lake Tacarigua.”<sup>152</sup>

Thus, Rojas seemingly finds parallels between Aguirre and other legendary leaders of the colonial and independence eras in the Americas. He even goes so far as to reinterpret his act of denaturalization from the Spanish Crown as an early attempt to establish a Latin American nation, referring to the Marañones as The Marañones Nation, despite no such notion of nationhood having been present in the 1561 rebellion. Rojas' description of Aguirre and his rebellion concluded with a brief passage mentioning the lasting impressions that persisted in the region of Venezuela. Akin to Southey and von Humboldt, Rojas notes that Aguirre's legacy attained a somewhat mythical foothold in Venezuela as a wandering spirit. He gives only fleeting mention of Aguirre's death at Barquisimeto, instead focusing more on his post-death legacy, writing:

“Thus disappeared this legendary figure of the time of the conquest. More than three centuries have passed, and still, the memory of their crimes has not been extinguished.

When, on dark nights, will-o'-the-wisps rise from the plains and swamps of Barquisimeto

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 344

and places on the coast of Borburata, and flakes of phosphoric light wander and shake at the whims of the wind, the peasants, upon seeing those lights, count their children, the wandering soul of the Tyrant Aguirre who finds neither joy nor rest on earth.”<sup>153</sup>

This shows that Rojas saw Aguirre as an early example of a Latin American caudillo or revolutionary, despite his tyrannical methods. [for some, revolutionary and tyrant would be seen in opposition; many considered caudillos tyrants by this time] Additionally, he was also seen as an important figure in the history of Venezuela. Not only does the work of Rojas show that Aguirre's legacy was an important aspect of the nineteenth-century Latin American identity, but he was also firmly implanted as a revolutionary, albeit a villainous one, a figure whose ideas were viewed as a predecessor to the Latin American independence movement.

As this chapter has shown, during the nineteenth century, the legacy of Lope de Aguirre underwent a dramatic revival amongst Latin American and European writers and revolutionaries. The revolutions occurring across the Americas and Europe profoundly impacted how Aguirre was perceived. Driven by his immediate need to find a figure to rally his revolution around, Simón Bolívar partially exalted Aguirre as a revolutionary predecessor and a figure ahead of his time. Furthermore, the works of Bello, Baralt, Tejero, and Rojas, who were all Venezuelan natives, repurposed Aguirre as a central figure in their nation's history and origins. To these writers, Aguirre was a villainous though important figure due to his early act of rebellion against Spanish colonialism in the Americas. The interpretation of Southey repurposed Aguirre as a literary embodiment of the revolution occurring in France during the late-eighteenth century to critique notions that Southey viewed as harmful or threatening. Though still almost unanimously condemned as a villainous figure, the nineteenth century saw Aguirre receive a partial revival,

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 345

which would lay the foundation for the interpretations of Aguirre in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In this last phase, Aguirre would draw the attention of historians as well as activists, revitalizing his legend some four centuries after his demise at Barquisimeto.

## **Chapter 5: Aguirre's Long Awaited Historical Redemption (1900-2022)**

After roughly three and a half centuries of being demonized, heroicized, and deconstructed as a semi-historical and literary figure increasingly detached from reality, Lope de Aguirre, or the memory of him, underwent yet another dramatic transformation. With the beginning of the twentieth century, Aguirre's story drew renewed interest among historians and writers, whose interpretations attempted to look past the three centuries of literary and historical distortions to reveal the 'true and historic Aguirre.' This century saw historians and authors attempt to grant Aguirre a voice in his own story, better contextualize his actions, and show an inherent awareness of Aguirre's historiographical treatment by each generation following his death. However, it is important to note that the views of Aguirre during this period varied widely and were by no means exempt from influence by each author's interests.

Most historical works aimed at redeeming Aguirre as a historical figure were produced by Latin American and Basque authors, though some English-language accounts are also of particular interest. This chapter will analyze how Aguirre's legacy became the subject of a fervent historiographical debate, primarily amongst two opposing schools of interpretation, spearheaded by the Basque authors and historians Segundo de Ispizúa and Emiliano Jos. They viewed Aguirre as a justifiable revolutionary and bloodthirsty madman, respectively. These authors produced their interpretations in the early twentieth century, and each inspired several supporting and counterarguments put forth by subsequent authors. Furthermore, I will examine a recent movement amongst historians to consider Aguirre as an ambivalent figure whose actions were neither good nor bad, as will be evidenced by the works of Beatriz Pastor Bodmer and Evan L. Balkan. This chapter will argue that the legacy of Lope de Aguirre underwent a dramatic

transformation during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as historians and authors have begun to perceive the Basque rebel or “Tyrant” as a somewhat nuanced historical figure. Furthermore, I will show that despite this era's collective goal of analyzing Aguirre as a historical figure, each author's own biases or aims continued to influence their respective interpretations of Aguirre. Preconceptions also affected how they utilized sources, both primary and secondary, to arrive at new interpretations.

In the order in which they will be analyzed, the twentieth and twenty-first works that produced notable interpretations of Aguirre are as follows: Segundo de Ispizúa's *Historia de los Vascos en América* (1918), Casto Fulgencio López's *Lope de Aguirre El Peregrino Primer Caudillo de América* (1947), Miguel Ortero Silva's *Lope de Aguirre, Principe de la Libertad* (1979), Emiliano Jos's *La Expedición de Ursúa al Dorado y la Rebelión de Lope de Aguirre* (1927), Juan B. Lastres and C. Alberto Seguí's *Lope de Aguirre, El Rebelde: Estudio Historico-Psicologico* (1942), Beatriz Pastor-Bodmer's *The Armature of Conquest: Spanish Accounts of the Discovery of America, 1492-1589* (1992), Stephen Minta's *Aguirre: The Re-creation of a Sixteenth-Century Journey Across South America* (1993) and Evan L. Balkan's *The Wrath of God: Lope de Aguirre, Revolutionary of the Americas* (2011). All of these authors attempted to look past earlier interpretations of the rebel and in doing so reveal a more historically faithful representation of Aguirre and his rebellion. As this chapter will show, Aguirre's historical revival during this period was widespread, and his image became the subject of intense historical debate between those who viewed him as a forerunner to Latin American independence, depicted him as a tyrannical mad man, or attempted to place him in his own times as a contradictory and ambivalent historical character. These authors showed an awareness of the distortion of Aguirre's image by prior generations and emphasized the need to contextualize his actions, placing them in

his own time. Nonetheless, despite each attempt to look past the centuries of earlier distortion of Aguirre's legacy, interpretations generated during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries were still imbued with each author's own biases or preferences.

The first twentieth-century attempt to redeem Aguirre as a historical figure was the Basque historian and author Segundo de Ispizúa in his six-volume historical study, *Historia de los Vascos en el Descubrimiento, Conquista y Civilización de América*. Ispizúa's fifth volume, published in Bilbao in 1918, dealt with Lope de Aguirre and “the rehabilitation of his name and his figure as one of the most amazing in the history of the New World.”<sup>154</sup> As a fellow Basque writing during a period of mounted interest in Basque Nationalism, Ispizúa viewed the condemnation of Aguirre's legacy by the Ex-Marañones and cronistas. All were Spanish, and Ispizúa condemned their works as biased and inaccurate accounts that were driven more by the author's interest than historical documentation. This awareness of the complex treatment of Aguirre's legacy is evidenced by Ispizúa's introduction, in which he argued, “there are three Aguirres: that of history, that of tradition, and a third that is neither of history nor tradition. To say whom this third Lope de Aguirre was, trying to remake or rehabilitate as far as possible, a historical figure distorted and adulterated by history and tradition, is the purpose of these pages.”<sup>155</sup> According to Ispizúa, this 'third Aguirre' could be found in the three letters purported to have been written by him during his rebellion. Using these letters and the early seventeenth-century accounts of Vásquez de Espinosa and Simón, he attempted to revive Aguirre as an almost heroic figure whose villainous image was the product of authors writing after his death and driven by their interests.

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<sup>154</sup> Ispizúa, *Historia de los Vascos*, i

<sup>155</sup> Ispizúa, *Historia de los Vascos*, 1

In order to understand why Ispizúa presented Aguirre and his historic rebellion in such a favorable light, it is important to consider the author's background. Born in 1869, Ispizúa was born in 1869 in the Basque city of Bermeo, located some seventy kilometers from Aguirre's hometown of Oñate. He spent his youth studying to become a priest in Peru, though ultimately turning to journalism. He found great success in Latin America as a journalist, founding the successful Costa Rican newspaper, *El Noticiero*, in 1903.<sup>156</sup> Returning to the Basque Country in the early 1910s, Ispizúa turned his attention to a growing Basque Nationalist movement occurring across the region. He was a co-founder of The Basque Nationalist Republican Circle of Bilbao in 1911 and participated in The 1920 Assembly of Basque Nationalism. Prior to his death in 1924, Ispizúa also published several books devoted to the history and culture of the Basque people, in which Aguirre was given particular attention.<sup>157</sup>

As evidenced by his life and background, Ispizúa was a strong supporter of Basque nationalism. The end of the *fueros*, or Basque home rule, following the Carlist Wars of the late nineteenth century and the 1871 Basque Economic Agreement, led to the region witnessing increasing support for Basque autonomy from Spain. Ispizúa likely saw parallels between Aguirre's act of denaturalization from the Spanish Crown and his own desire for Basque autonomy. Thus, Ispizúa stressed Aguirre's Basqueness and drew direct parallels between him and Bolívar, also of Basque heritage. For him, Aguirre's rebellion was an entirely justified act whose goal was to establish an autonomous American government.

His reinterpretation of Aguirre's legacy begins with contextualizing the Peruvian Civil Wars of the mid-sixteenth century, which Ispizúa cited as having fundamentally shaped Aguirre's 1561 rebellion. He cited Aguirre's participation in the quelling of the rebellions of Don Sebastián

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<sup>156</sup> Galster, *Aguirre oder Die Willkür*, 352

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, 357



de Castilla and Francisco Hernández Girón as evidence that Aguirre had served royalist interests in the Americas for several decades as a counterargument to the writings of the cronistas who he claimed distorted the truth of Aguirre's service to the Crown. According to him, Aguirre's rebellious nature was not uncommon in his own time and what set him apart was his audacity to declare independence from the Spanish Crown. His reconstruction of the events of the Marañones Rebellion relied upon the earlier accounts of Francisco Vasquez de Espinosa, Pedro Simón, and Toribio de Ortiguera, though he was heavily critical of these sources as having intentionally fabricated aspects of their respective retellings. According to Ispizúa, the description of Aguirre as a cruel individual whose rebellion was driven by his bloodlust was a fabrication of his contemporaries.

In addressing the treatment of Aguirre's legacy, Ispizúa wrote, “Lope de Aguirre, so vilified, slandered, and execrated by his contemporaries, and so forgotten and ignored after that, will be, and should be, recognized as one of the greatest, most extraordinary, most marvelous figures in the history of America.”<sup>158</sup> Clearly, Ispizúa saw Aguirre's villainous image as due to slandering by the Ex-Marañones and cronistas, whom he viewed as untruthful. Whereas these accounts had painted Aguirre as a madman and tyrant, Ispizúa conversely argued that:

“He did not kill for the love of killing, but because among the other rowdy soldiers formed in Peru, and even in other parts of America, there was no other way, only the painful fact of being a victim of one's circumstances. We cannot deny him two glorious acts: his audacious and stupendous expedition through the greatest rivers of America, a feat with which no other in the history of the conquest of the New World can be

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<sup>158</sup> Ispizúa, *Historia de los Vascos*, 343

compared; and his clear, defined, and sustained commitment to dying for American Independence.”<sup>159</sup>

Furthermore, Ispizúa claims that Aguirre's desire for independence and decades of mistreatment by colonial representatives was the cause of his rebellion: “What moved Lope de Aguirre in his task? The liberation of the American lands from the oppression in which, according to him, their tyrannical rulers, corrupt judges, and their warlike and epicurean friars kept them captive.”<sup>160</sup> Ispizúa thus viewed Aguirre as an almost tragic yet heroic figure. He attempted to redeem Aguirre as a predecessor or precursor to Latin American independence and thus to paint his rebellion and many cruelties as justifiable in light of his ultimate anticolonial or anti-imperial goal.

Even so, Ispizúa's attempt to redeem Aguirre as a historical figure was not without its shortcomings and inevitable influence by Ispizúa's interests. Regarding the sources he relied upon, namely the Ex-Marañones, Ispizúa viewed them as inherently biased and untruthful accounts written for self-exculpatory purposes. Furthermore, Ispizúa suggested that the Marañones' status as Spaniards and their supposed bias against Basques also influenced their writings. Instead, Ispizúa relied on the three surviving letters of Aguirre to reconstruct his retelling of the rebellion, granting them credence as trustworthy historical documents as opposed to the distorted writings of the Ex-Marañones. Furthermore, despite Ispizúa's claim that his redemption of Aguirre was an objective exercise, his account seems to have excluded specific contradictory claims and arguably selectively used sources. Much of his account relied upon his assertion that the three letters written by Aguirre were indeed written by his hand as opposed to items written by his contemporaries. Much like Bolívar, Ispizúa's desire to envision Aguirre as a

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 276

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 3

symbol of rebellion and Basque heroism led to a whitewashed interpretation of Aguirre. He even excluded several examples of Aguirre's cruelties. Despite treating him as a historical figure, Ispizúa's interpretation was inherently biased by his desire to present Aguirre as a prototype of Basque Nationalism.

Ispizúa's *Historia de Los Vascos* proved to be highly influential in the historical revival of Aguirre during the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, his interpretation of Aguirre as a historical predecessor to subsequent Latin American revolutionaries inspired contemporary (mostly Latin American) authors such as Casto Fulgencio López, Rosa Arciniegas, and José Ladislao Andara, Emilio Choy, and Miguel Otero Silva to produce similar works aimed at resuscitating Aguirre's image. The works of López and Otero Silva are particularly noteworthy and embody the work of liberal intellectuals in reviving Aguirre's legacy as a historical figure. Both López and Silva were Venezuelan authors who were part of the Generation of 1928, a group of young intellectuals who were openly critical of the dictatorship of then-Venezuelan leader Juan Vicente Gómez. Much like Ispizúa, both authors sought to repurpose Aguirre to support the spread of leftist ideals across Latin America and utilize him as a symbol of Latin American liberalism.

Casto Fulgencio López's *Lope de Aguirre, El Peregrino: Primer Caudillo de América*, first published in Caracas in 1947, was a direct response to Ispizúa's earlier work. Born in 1893 in Venezuela, Casto Fulgencio López devoted much of his life to writing on Venezuelan history and culture. Having studied at the National School for Men in Caracas, López spent several years in Spain working in the Archivo General de Indias in Seville. He became interested in Venezuela's colonial era and the independence movement of the late-nineteenth century. He was

also a founding member of the Caracas Athenaeum in 1936.<sup>161</sup> Some of his first works, *La Margarita* and *La Guaira*, published in 1937 and 1941 respectively, focused upon the history of Margarita Island and the founding of a unique Latin American identity during the War of Spanish American Independence under Bolívar.

López's account of Aguirre, which he described as a 'biographic narrative,' was based mainly on documents he encountered while working in the *Archivo General de Indias*, primarily the Vásquez-Almesto (1561) account. The first chapter is devoted to Aguirre's life prior to arriving in the Americas, though due to the lack of primary sources on the subject, many of López's claims are his interpretations. López paints Aguirre as having lived a relatively normal life before joining the Orsúa expedition, emphasizing his characteristic as a loving father to Elvira. Interestingly, he went against Vásquez's claims of Aguirre being a particularly notorious and violent individual during this period in his life. Instead, López argued that Aguirre was hopeful about coming to America and faced a society dominated by cruelty and corruption upon arriving. In retelling the Esquivel incident at Potosí, he contended that Aguirre was justified in his actions and that he was the victim of a particularly cruel magistrate. Only when Aguirre enlists in the El Dorado expedition does López admit that his actions were less than honorable. He repeatedly refers to Aguirre as 'the strong caudillo of the Marañones'<sup>162</sup> and 'Directorate of the Revolution.'<sup>163</sup> López even goes so far as to present Orsúa's assassination as a justifiable coup and his rebellion as a 'revolutionary anti-imperial task.'<sup>164</sup>

As evidenced by the usage of twentieth-century terms, López saw Aguirre's many cruelties and murders as justifiable in light of his revolutionary mission. For López, Aguirre was

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<sup>161</sup> Galster, *Aguirre oder Die Willkür*, 471

<sup>162</sup> López, *Lope de Aguirre El Peregrino*, 82

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, 65

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, 47

no worse than other figures of the conquest, such as Hernan Cortés and the Pizarros, because, according to him, unlike other figures of the conquest, Aguirre purportedly showed a desire to free all subjugated groups and purportedly showed generosity to women, indigenous peoples, and enslaved Africans. However, this claim was in direct defiance of contemporary sources. In justifying Aguirre's actions, López argued, that his endeavors sought “to be apocalyptic, an instrument of destiny to carry out the most transcendental undertaking in the history of the conquest; the separatist proclamation of America.”<sup>165</sup> He directly described Aguirre as a forerunner to Bolívar and as a man whose actions were no worse than those committed by his contemporaries. Overall, López's account, much like that of Ispizúa, seemingly pardoned Aguirre of his many crimes to present him in a more dignified light. According to them, the Basque rebel's actions had justification, and the colonial system itself forced him to rebel.

A similar argument, and arguably a whitewashing of Aguirre's legacy, was repeated by the Venezuelan journalist and author Miguel Otero Silva. Like López, Otero Silva was a Venezuelan and member of the Generation of 1928, a group of young intellectuals who had openly opposed the dictatorship of Venezuelan president Juan Vicente Gómez. Born in 1908 in Caracas, Otero was a prolific author and journalist. As an undergrad at the Central University of Venezuela, he became involved in a plot to overthrow the Venezuelan government, forcing him to be exiled to Curaçao in 1928, not returning to Venezuela until the death of Gómez seven years later. As a journalist, Otero published several articles for which he was labeled a Communist and forced into exile once again. He served in the Spanish Civil War on the Republican side as well. In 1958, he was elected as the Senate Representative for the Venezuelan region of Aragua,

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 109

though his connections with communism ultimately forced him to retire from politics and journalism.

In 1979, Otero Silva published the novel *Lope de Aguirre, Príncipe de la Libertad*, which portrayed Aguirre as a revolutionary leader and focused on his spirit, confronting writers who had depicted him villainously following his death. As this work is fictional, Otero Silva subtly inserted several of his judgments into the text, putting words into the mouths of key characters. In describing Aguirre's sacking of Margarita Island, Otero seemingly justifies every one of the Basque rebel's acts. For example: “The precautions that Lope de Aguirre took when he seized the Margarita government were neither so unwise nor as cruel as your lordship has been told.”<sup>166</sup> Otero even went so far as to consider Aguirre's occupation of Margarita as a positive development, arguing that his actions benefitted the island's citizens and the only individuals harmed were government representatives.

Miguel Otero Silva's leftist interpretation of Aguirre is especially evident in this regard. Aguirre's act of raising the prices that his Marañones had to pay for a chicken on Margarita Island, likely meant to foster a false sense of trust, was reinterpreted by Otero Silva as an act of compassion. He wrote,

“Since the local people who worked the ranches and the farms were continually cheated by [their] governors and [the] merchants, Lope de Aguirre ordered an increase in the prices paid for their work and their products ... Lope de Aguirre, also, tried to defend the virtue and integrity of all honorable women. they were all decorously lodged in the same house with the “child” Elvira, daughter of the dictator. For these many reasons, we have

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<sup>166</sup> Silva, *Lope de Aguirre Principe de la Libertad*, 242

stated that Lope de Aguirre's government was neither so savage nor so foolish as Your Mercy has been told by vengeful friars and bad chroniclers."<sup>167</sup>

In his thorough defense of Aguirre, albeit a fictional one, Otero Silva even directly critiqued the cronistas whose depictions of Aguirre as a bloodthirsty madman proved so influential in the subsequent shaping of his legacy. In his postscript, Otero directly referenced the treatment of Aguirre's legacy by the sixteenth-century cronistas, writing, "The biographers and interpreters of Lope de Aguirre have conspired to pile upon his memory such an arsenal of epithets and insults that they have won the battle to show him as the greatest prototype of human iniquity."<sup>168</sup> Though his account is fictional, Otero Silva based his interpretation of Aguirre heavily upon his historical research, which makes how he portrayed the Basque rebel relevant to this chapter. As with Ispizúa and López, Silva produced a heavily quasi-Marxist version of Aguirre and viewed his rebellion and many cruelties committed as justifiable.

In his prolific journalism career, Otero Silva also directly critiqued Aguirre's villainous portrayal during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He showed awareness of the appropriation of Aguirre's legacy by such cronistas as Aguado and Castellanos. In a 1970 article concerning this subject, Otero wrote:

"concerning the character of Aguirre, an outrage was committed when he was judged to be nothing more than a bloodthirsty murderer, a raving madman and an emissary of Hell ... His story was written by his bitterest enemies (the Spanish clergy and the scribes who served the Spanish Crown) and by those of his companions in crime who tried to save their skins before the courts by heaping all the blame on the dead Aguirre. It is far from

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 256-258

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 299

my intention to justify Lope de Aguirre's cruelty ... but I do think it is time to consider some things that put those crimes in their proper place.”<sup>169</sup>

This awareness of the distortion of Aguirre's legacy was a central aspect of Otero Silva's fictional portrayal of Lope de Aguirre and his subsequent journalistic writings on the matter. In his defense of Aguirre, Otero even evoked the famous trope that 'history is written by the victors,' stating:

“The explanation is simply logical: the deeds of these warriors (Aguirre and the Marañones were told by their supporters after they had won; whereas the adventures of Aguirre were told by his most passionate enemies once they had defeated and decapitated him. In the opinion of almost all historians, essayists, novelists, and poets who have written about him, Lope de Aguirre is no less than a total madman, a bloodthirsty psychotic, a feral neurotic, a combination of Nero and Herod, and other names that could be considered clinically as categorical.”<sup>170</sup>

As evidenced by this passage, Otero Silva strongly criticized how Aguirre was portrayed by his contemporaries, claiming that their own biases resulted in a distorted representation - one now tinged with the language of pop psychology. In defending Aguirre's actions, Otero granted more credence to Aguirre's own writings while discounting subsequent accounts as inaccurate. López and Ispizúa utilized this similar process in their earlier iterations. All three of these authors came from leftist schools of thought and showed a strong anti-imperialist mindset in their writings. For them, Aguirre was no worse than other figures of the conquest era, and his rebellion was a bold attempt to rid the Americas of corruption and cruelty by colonial officials.

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<sup>169</sup> Silva, *Journalistic Writings*, 74

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, 75



Ispizúa's 1918 interpretation of Aguirre as a robust revolutionary leader whose rebellion was justified produced an immediate response. Venezuelan authors such as López and Otero Silva generally supported Ispizúa's claims, but not everyone was so inclined. Some worried that such redemption of Aguirre's legacy amounted to whitewashing, intentionally distorting the historical facts surrounding Aguirre and his rebellion. This counter-interpretation, spearheaded by Emiliano Jos, would argue that Aguirre was indeed a cruel tyrant and madman and dismissed claims that Aguirre was a predecessor to Bolívar as preposterous. Supporters of this more traditional interpretation drew from the writings of the Ex-Marañones and sixteenth-century cronistas, who were considered trustworthy sources, though they acknowledged their possible biases.

In response to Ispizúa, in 1927 Emiliano Jos published a noteworthy book on Aguirre entitled *La Expedición de Ursúa al Dorado y la Rebelión de Lope de Aguirre: Según Documentos y Manuscritos Inéditos*. Jos was born in 1897 in the Basque Country, and he devoted his life to studying the history of colonial Latin America. He became a leading specialist in the conquest era and early explorations of America. He received his Ph.D. in history from the Complutense University of Madrid, and later, he spent several decades as a professor of geography and history at the San Isidoro Institute in Seville, during time which he produced a vast number of books and journal articles on the history of the Spanish conquest of the Americas before he died in 1961.<sup>171</sup> In addressing Ispizúa's earlier interpretation, Jos wrote that the "accusations of falsehood launched by Ispizúa against Vásquez, goes against his defendant, Aguirre, according to the historical facts ... in the bloody halo of the crazy Aguirre; there is no room for the out-of-tune colorations that have been added."<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Galster, *Aguirre oder Die Willkür*, 368

<sup>172</sup> Jos, *La Expedición de Ursúa al Dorado y la Rebelión de Lope de Aguirre*, 4

Whereas Ispizúa's depiction of Aguirre relied upon the truthfulness of Aguirre's three written letters and the inaccuracy of the contemporary source, Jos assumed the opposite. He primarily relied upon the writings of Vasquez de Espinosa and the ex-Marañones and questioned the authenticity of Aguirre's three surviving letters. Though he does grant Aguirre a hint of credit 'as a most interesting and extraordinary person,' Jos still thoroughly vilifies Aguirre, writing:

“The unusual frankness, the crazy arrogance that can be observed in him (Aguirre) were not the only characteristics of Lope de Aguirre *El Peregrino*. He was also the cunning feline-like butcher who slyly killed his prey; he was an outright traitor, a man of misplaced truthfulness, a man whose soul was filled with more twists and turns than a path between a mountain... what other name can be given to someone who responds with a sword thrust to someone who gives good advice, who wanted to hang one of his soldiers because he agreed with his ideas, who (Aguirre) in pathetic terms promised for his own life to respect them all and almost wanted to kill twenty or thirty.”<sup>173</sup>

To Jos, Aguirre's rebellion and the many murders he committed were not justifiable acts aimed at the goal of liberating the Americas but were the acts of an insane and evil man whose rebellion went no further than Aguirre's own desire for violence and bloodshed.

Following his introduction, in which Jos denounced Ispizúa's interpretation as a falsehood, he provided an overview of the expedition and rebellion based upon the earlier account of Aristides Rojas. Jos devoted individual chapters to discrediting Ispizúa's main arguments following this brief recounting. Jos argued that the accounts of the Ex-Marañones, which Ispizúa dismissed as false and biased, were indeed reliable. Though he did acknowledge the possibility of inherent bias, he generally regards their statements as truthful. He concluded

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<sup>173</sup> Jos, *La Expedición de Ursúa al Dorado y la Rebelión de Lope de Aguirre*, 5

that Aguirre was not a precursor to Latin American independence. Instead, he argued that Aguirre used deception and fear to lead the Marañones and that the many executions and murders were committed for no other reason than Aguirre's insanity.

To support this grim character judgment or “personality assessment,”<sup>174</sup> Jos argued that Aguirre's paranoia and increasing insanity seemingly drove his actions. He wrote,

“He had a great fear of possible conspiracies against his life. This fear of his turned into persecution mania. It drove him crazy and made him commit crimes, no longer unjust but foolish. As he said, his heart warned him of the supposed betrayals that were against him, so from the moment his cardiac viscera became the monitor of the conspiracies of the Marañones, none of them were safe.”<sup>175</sup>

Despite the fact that Jos overtly interprets Aguirre’s actions to be those of an insane and paranoid individual, his interpretation shares a key parallel with Ispizúa’s contrasting argument. Unlike the accounts of the Cronistas, who concludes that Aguirre was a mad man and as such argue that Aguirre as an individual merits no further analysis, Jos bases his interpretation of Aguirre more in historical realism and psychological analysis of Aguirre as an individual. He analyzes Aguirre as an individual and expressly diagnoses him psychologically versus the sixteenth century tradition of simply using such terms as ‘madman’ to describe Aguirre’s mental capability. Jos asserted that Aguirre's prior experience in the many Peruvian Civil Wars had left him with the paranoia of betrayal and a possible neurotic condition. He acknowledged the Basque's marginalization in America during the colonial period, though he remained adamant in his condemnation of Aguirre and his actions. Jos's book concluded that Aguirre was likely suffering from some form of mental illness and was not the strong revolutionary leader depicted

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 4

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 102

by Ispizúa. Instead, he was an individual whose circumstances granted him the opportunity to exert his violent tendencies, and the isolation of the Amazon only contributed to his increasing decline into insanity.

To support his claims, Jos included extensive footnotes in his work. They included reference to several primary sources, including the Ex-Marañones' accounts, Aguirre's declaration of denaturalization, and surviving court records of several of the Ex-Marañones. Overall, Jos's heavy reliance on his source material and adherence to accepted facts granted his argument a greater sense of credence compared to Ispizúa's. Even so, Jos's analysis of Aguirre's mental state relied heavily on pop psychology and speculation.

Following Jos's characterization of Aguirre as a madman and tyrant, the Peruvian doctors and historians Juan B. Lastres and C. Alberto Segúin produced an analysis of Aguirre in response to both Jos's and Ispizúa's earlier interpretations. Lastres was a noted physician at the Medical Faculty of Lima and noted historian of indigenous medicinal practices, whereas Segúin was a psychiatrist and neurologist.<sup>176</sup> Their 1942 book, *Lope de Aguirre, El Rebelde: Estudio Historico-Psicológico*, went much further in the direction of psychoanalysis. They presented an Aguirre that conformed neither to Ispizúa's heroicization and justification of his rebellion nor to Jos's total condemnation of his character as a madman. Published in Lima, Lastres and Segúin's book was a self-described 'historical-psychological'<sup>177</sup> analysis. According to the authors, both Ispizúa's and Jos's interpretations were objectively prejudiced. By contrast, they sought to reveal a 'real human knowledge of Aguirre,' relying upon the earlier writings of Vasquez de Espinosa, Simón and Ortiguera.

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<sup>176</sup> Galster, *Aguirre oder Die Willkür*, 401

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, 403

The first half of *Lope de Aguirre, El Rebelde* focuses on historical analysis, placing Aguirre's rebellion into the larger period of Civil Wars occurring in Peru during the mid-sixteenth century. Citing the earlier rebellions of Gonzalo Pizarro, Girón, and Carvajal, Lastres and Seguín agree with Ispizúa's claim that Aguirre's cruelty was 'common currency' for his time writing,

“and when speaking of his 'cruelty,' which has been exaggerated so much in this case to the point of him being known by this negative quality, we must record that at the time it was common currency in wars. Why believe and maintain that Lope's cruelty was superior to that of the other conquistadors?”<sup>178</sup>

Seguín and Lastres agreed with Jos's claim that Aguirre was likely a second child, which would explain why he would have emigrated to America, despite coming from a noble Basque family. In addressing Aguirre's three letters, they accepted their authenticity and noted the 'cunning wit and cynicism' they exhibited. Lastres and Seguín concluded that Aguirre's actions were not out of the ordinary given his environment and his several years of supposed subjugation and disillusionment in the Americas prior to the Orsúa expedition. These were the cause of his rebellion, discounting Ispizúa's claim that the rebellion was a forerunner to Latin American independence or had any goals of separatism from the Spanish Crown.

Whereas both Jos and Ispizúa had argued that Aguirre's rebellion was extraordinary, whether as a forerunner to later independence movements or as having been notably crueler than earlier rebellions, Seguín and Lastres instead concluded that his goals were not out of the ordinary. And despite having exhibited some degree of cynicism, they concluded that, “his project to conquer Peru is not unreasonable, despite being audacious.”<sup>179</sup> Following this

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<sup>178</sup> Lastres and Seguín, *Lope de Aguirre, El Rebelde*, 50

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, 77

historical analysis which attempted to place Aguirre's rebellion in the context of his place and time period and present him as a victim of his circumstances, their analysis shifted into a psychopathological analysis of Aguirre as an individual.

This second half of Lastres and Seguí's book focuses more on using the accounts of the Ex-Marañones and Aguirre's three letters to construct a case study of Aguirre's mental state. A similar analysis had been included by Emiliano Jos in his earlier book on Aguirre, though this interpretation went more into depth and attempted to examine the rebel more objectively versus solely seeing him as a hero or villain. Referencing Jos's earlier diagnosis of Aguirre as a psychopathic and extraordinarily violent individual, Lastres and Seguí responded,

“nothing that we know about him would lead us to diagnose him as psychotic, based on our current understanding of this malady. We find no sign of an alteration in his emotional faculties that might allow us to so characterize him.”<sup>180</sup>

It appears these medical men viewed Aguirre as a product of his circumstances, implying that any other individual may have acted similarly under the same circumstances. They acknowledge that Aguirre was undoubtedly a violent individual, though they granted him some sympathy. In addressing his supposed paranoia and irrational behavior as leader of the Marañones, they wrote, “as for his 'chasing mania,' he had nothing of the sort. The fear, the precautions, the distrust were perfectly justified. On several occasions, they tried to assassinate him. That handful of unscrupulous and desperate men (The Marañones) would have succeeded if the 'tyrant' did not take care of himself as he did.”<sup>181</sup>

Continuing with their psychological analysis of Aguirre, Lastres and Seguí diagnosed him with an “abnormal personality and psychopathic tendencies devoid of affect.” This diagnosis

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 118

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 78

expressly acknowledged that Aguirre was indeed a unique individual, though his rebellion was not out of line with the more extensive process of rebellion occurring in Peru during the period. This interpretation of Aguirre was one of the most objective attempts at revealing the 'true and historical' Aguirre. It acknowledged some aspects of both Ispizúa's and Jos's arguments, but the authors urged that future analyses of Aguirre should follow a similar suit of placing him in the context of sixteenth-century Peru and treating him neither as a revolutionary hero nor as a murderous madman. As will be seen by the final analysis of the works of Beatriz Pastor Bodmer and Evan L. Balkan, the new mold cast by Lastres and Seguí proved highly influential in modern understandings of Aguirre and his complex legacy.

The next author worth analyzing in this chapter is the Spanish linguist and historian Beatriz Pastor Bodmer. Pastor is a Spanish national educated at the Universities of Barcelona and Minnesota. After receiving her Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in 1977, she authored many books on the history of the Spanish American conquest and Lope de Aguirre and taught at several universities. Pastor's most notable book, *The Armature of Conquest: Spanish Accounts of the Discovery of America, 1492-1589*, was published in 1992 to coincide with the quincentennial of Columbus' first voyage to America. It was a textual analysis of colonial-era texts that offered insight into the conquest and how contemporary authors viewed it. Alongside textual analyses of Columbus's diary, Cortes's letters, and Alonso de Ercilla's *La Araucana*, Pastor devoted a chapter to Aguirre and the Marañones as seen through the accounts of the Ex-Marañones. Furthermore, this chapter provided context on the Peruvian civil wars, which Pastor claimed promoted a "tradition of uprisings"<sup>182</sup> of which Aguirre was part. Pastor offers a general

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<sup>182</sup> Bodmer, *The Armature of Conquest*, 188

analysis of the Ex-Marañones' testimony, characterizing them as “different voices in a single narrative,”<sup>183</sup> meant to serve the authors' self-justificatory purposes.

In addressing Aguirre, Pastor Bodmer calls for a “critical reassessment of the figure of Lope de Aguirre from a historical and literary point-of-view.”<sup>184</sup> She acknowledges the earlier interpretations of Ispizúa and Jos, though she concludes that both were inherently prejudiced. She identifies a third voice, which was closer to the authentic and historic Aguirre:

“there exists, however, a voice of Aguirre that all the accusations and judgments in the accounts could neither obliterate nor silence. The few documents that have preserved this voice provide a sufficient as well as a factual foundation for analyzing and reinterpreting his character... this discourse revolves obsessively around the crisis of the centralized power structure, a crisis that Aguirre identifies with three fundamental developments: the decadence of existing political structures, the disintegration of the vassal relationship, and the corruption of the traditional ideological values.”<sup>185</sup>

Pastor clearly agrees with Ispizúa's assertion that Aguirre's three letters provided the most accurate means to analyze him as a historical figure. She continues with her interpretation of Aguirre's writing, arguing that his rebellion did have an ideological purpose of conquering Peru to return it to an idealized past. However, his rebellion should not be connected to subsequent Latin American independence. In concluding her analysis of Aguirre's three letters, Pastor says:

“Aguirre's letters and speeches reveal that he was an anguished, anachronistic rebel, not a madman... Aguirre's terrible actions exemplify in a condensed, intensified way all the forms of violence that characterized the period of the conquest. This is not to say that he

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 201

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 189

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 195



was typical of the average sixteenth-century conquistador, but to stress that the difference between his cruelty- so often labeled insane- and the forms of institutionalized violence that shaped the conquest as a whole was only a matter of degree. His actions unmask and reveal the true nature of a conquest founded on systematic violence and the abuse of power. And his obscure, tormented discourse reflects his anguished perception and his desperate nostalgia for a mythical lost world. His words trace the hopeless awakening of a man caught between his nostalgic flight and his inability to reach a clear understanding of his historical situation.”<sup>186</sup>

Thus, Pastor asserts that Aguirre was not an extraordinary example of violence nor typical of the conquistadors of his period. Instead, he was an important figure whose rebellion capped the 'tradition of uprisings'<sup>187</sup> that defined sixteenth-century colonial society. Written in the late 1980s, Pastor's text, compared to interpretations of Aguirre produced in the early decades of the twentieth century, stressed that Aguirre was neither hero nor villain. Instead, she stressed that he should be considered as part of the larger period of civil wars occurring in Peru, as he was not expressly worse than other rebels such as Girón or Carvajal. Overall, although her analysis is based upon the reliability of Aguirre's three letters, which is somewhat ambiguous at best, Pastor's analysis does succeed in placing him as a man of his own time and providing a context for the key factors that may have influenced his rebellion. Furthermore, it also places her in a late twentieth-century tendency to rewrite the Spanish conquest of the Americas as a total abomination.

The next interpretation of Aguirre worth analyzing is that of Stephen Minta, who wrote on Aguirre in his 1993 book, *Aguirre, The Re-Construction of a Sixteenth-Century Journey*

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 203-4

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 188

*Across South America*. Minta has been a professor of linguistics at the University of York's Department of English and Related Literature since 1973. Trained as a linguist, he has shown a particular interest in non-English works of literature and how literary attitudes have shifted through history, particularly in the Spanish, French, and Italian realms. Minta has written extensively on historical literature, publishing books on various topics, including the British Poet Lord Byron, Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the literary treatment of Aguirre throughout history, and Renaissance literature. As evidenced by his strong interest in comparative literature, Minta approaches the subject of Aguirre from a literary perspective and shows a keen interest in his image that subsequent generations have distorted.

Turning to his book on Aguirre, Minta's work can be categorized as a combination of a literary and historical reconstruction of Aguirre's life and the author's own experiences in retracing the route of the 1561 Marañones Rebellion. As such, Minta's narrative of Aguirre is akin to those of some of the sixteenth and seventeenth cronistas, who also based their respective interpretations of Aguirre on their travels across colonial America. His book seamlessly sways between Minta's commentary on his travels across Peru and the Amazonian Rainforest and his interpretation of Aguirre. However, unlike Aguirre's unsympathetic and harsh treatment by the cronistas, Minta goes to great lengths to paint a more sympathetic portrait of Aguirre. He argues that Aguirre likely came to the Americas due to poverty and that he was faced with an incredibly disparate and violent society that offered little to latecomers as much of the region's wealth and titles had already been claimed. Furthermore, he claims that the harsh conditions faced by Aguirre upon his arrival to Peru were by no means unique. In his introduction, Minta writes,

“In the late 1550s, a Basque adventurer named Lope de Aguirre set out from Cuzco in search of El Dorado. There was nothing unusual in that; it was almost a commonplace ...

Besides, for a penniless hidalgo, there was nowhere else to go. It was over twenty-five years since the Spanish had seized Peru from the Incas. Most of the Indians had been overcome. A time of civil war among the Spaniards had come and gone, and the age of the fighting man was drawing to a close. Soon the title of conquistador would only ring in memory ... The expedition on which Lope de Aguirre was embarked was a final chance, the greatest of them all.”<sup>188</sup>

As evidenced by this passage, Minta viewed the expedition of Orsúa as the last chance for many of its participants to claim a piece of America's vast riches. In his interpretation, desperation and a sense of disillusionment were the cause of El Dorado's persistence in sixteenth-century colonial society. Furthermore, he suggests that this widespread sense of desperation, likely shared amongst the Marañones, likely allowed Aguirre's rebellion to succeed for such an extended period. According to Minta, The Marañones, Aguirre included, had traveled to the Americas under the illusion of vast opportunities and, upon realizing that such wealth was long gone, desperately clung to the fantastical myth of El Dorado as the last chance. When it became apparent that such a place didn't exist, they turned to rebellion as a last-ditch effort.

According to Minta, Aguirre was the first to realize the futility of continuing Orsúa's search for El Dorado and succeeded in convincing his fellow soldiers of fortune that continuing on such an illusory expedition would only lead to further despair, if not death. He interprets Aguirre's call to rebellion to have arisen out of his refusal to accept his unfortunate circumstances and a last-ditch effort to cement himself as one of the notable figures of his period, even if it meant falling on the wrong side of history. In interpreting Aguirre's desire to rebel against the Spanish Crown, Minta writes,

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<sup>188</sup> Minta, *Aguirre, The Re-creation of a Sixteenth-Century Journey Across South America*, 6

“The challenge before them was to become the kind of men their actions already supposed them to be: independent and self-creating ... Lope de Aguirre seems always to have been fascinated by the idea of a traitor. It was part of his search for self-definition, and it appealed to his love of drama. To acknowledge oneself a traitor was to receive recognition in the face of the established world: no one would remember Judas if he hadn't betrayed Christ.”<sup>189</sup>

Thus, Minta interpreted Aguirre's actions as being deeply rooted in the rebel's desire to establish a name for himself, and his growing disillusionment led him to not care whether his legacy would fall on the side of good or bad. Furthermore, Minta rejects interpretations of Aguirre which blame his insanity and fondness for violence as the primary forces behind his rebellion, likely referring to Jos' earlier account. For him, Aguirre was a rational individual whose own dire circumstances forced him between a rock and a hard place: he could rebel and establish a name for himself or forever be forgotten as just another unfortunate want-to-be conquistador.

Furthermore, in granting Aguirre a sense of justification behind his method of leadership via fear, he envisions the rebel's earlier involvement in the Peruvian Civil Wars as having influenced his leadership style. Citing Aguirre's witnessing of the failed rebellion of Gonzalo Pizarro and Francisco de Carvajal, Minta argues that Aguirre's seemingly paranoid and cruel behavior was, in fact, somewhat justified, albeit misguided, acts by a man who had witnessed what would happen to him if he granted the Marañones even a slight opportunity to turn against him. Thus, Minta creates a clear parallel between Aguirre and Gonzalo Pizarro, claiming that the

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 160

former learned several valuable lessons concerning how to rebel successfully from the latter.

Minta writes,

“In all official writings, Gonzalo Pizarro is the complete traitor; but Aguirre remembers the popular warrior-leader brought down by the pettiness of officialdom and the treachery of friends. From Gonzalo's story Aguirre takes three things: a certain fatalism in the face of history, a belief that no one can be trusted, and the knowledge that absolute power is one of life's most beguiling and dangerous fictions.”<sup>190</sup>

By creating a parallel between Aguirre's rebellion and that of Gonzalo Pizarro, Minta attempts to rationalize Aguirre's actions. To Minta, he was not guided by insanity, but his seemingly cruel style of leadership was instead based in his own observations of earlier failed rebellions. He acknowledges however that the many murders and cruelties which he inflicted during his period of leadership should not be considered a totally justifiable act. Instead, Minta points out that violence was commonplace for Aguirre's time and that his leadership style was not so different from other colonial era figures. Successful leadership during the early colonial period almost always required leadership through fear, and as Minta argues through the case of Gonzalo Pizarro, any show of weakness could result in the failure of command. Minta also comments on Aguirre's seeming refusal to give up on his rebellious quest, despite facing increasingly overwhelming obstacles. According to him, Aguirre's desperation prevented him from accepting his dire circumstances and the ultimate unviability of his plan to overthrow the government of Peru. Furthermore, he suggests that Aguirre likely had an awareness of the futility of his plan and possible awareness of his ultimate fate,

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid, 161-162

“Aguirre would not have been surprised at his fate. He used to say that his soul was beyond saving and that he would burn in hell. Yet his passive despair, which is closely linked to his love of the theatrical, was always in conflict with his belief that he was made for the world and that the world was made for action. He could not accept that he had come too late to win the inheritances of the Indies.”<sup>191</sup>

Thus, Aguirre’s persistence and determination, according to Minta, was what allowed his rebellion to succeed for an extended period of time but was also the cause of his downfall. He concludes that while Aguirre’s actions were somewhat justified given his dire and desperate circumstances, such an audacious plan was bound to fail from the beginning.

In his conclusion, Minta provides closing remarks on modern day perceptions of Aguirre in the Basque Country. For the most part, he dismisses the notion that Aguirre's status as a Basque had any influence in guiding his rebellion, likely the contradictory arguments by Segundo de Ispizúa and Casto Fulgencio López. For Minta, any connection between Aguirre's rebellion and Latin American Independence or contemporary notions of Basque separatism is a little too farfetched. Indeed, Minta does not believe that Aguirre, despite his affinity for rebellion, would likely not have been an outright participant in the Basque separatist movement of the twentieth century, writing,

“I can't believe he would have joined ETA and become a terrorist – he wasn't the sort to join things. But as a sixteenth-century wanderer and rebel against Madrid he had a placer among the favorite sons of Oñate.”<sup>192</sup>

Thus, Minta concludes that Aguirre's rebellion was primarily caused by his decades of perceived mistreatment in the Americas and actively encouraged by the highly violent nature of

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid, 225

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 220

sixteenth-century Peruvian society. However, Minta does conclude that Aguirre's rebellion was explicitly aimed at the Spanish Crown and shared some ideals with subsequent rebellions against Spanish rule, and its relevance in that sense is what allowed Aguirre's legacy and revolutionary ideals to persist long after his death.

Turning to Minta's views towards Aguirre's historiographical and literary treatment, he shows an awareness that the accounts produced by Aguirre's contemporaries cannot be taken entirely at face value, claiming, "They don't always agree with each other. They moralize, they exaggerate, they invent. But they do seem to be telling the same story."<sup>193</sup> Thus, he does grant these sources a degree of credibility, despite their inherent flaws as historical sources.

Furthermore, Minta also shows an interest in the importance of the three letters of Aguirre as important tools for understanding him as an individual,

"There are three letters written, or rather dictated, by Aguirre himself. They are fascinating in many ways. Curiously, though they do not give an idea of his point of view, they are easily reconcilable with the accounts of others. It's as if, at the end of his unsuccessful life, Aguirre had freely chosen the only role left to him, that of the villain of the piece."<sup>194</sup>

He also briefly mentions the subsequent interpretations of Aguirre, mainly produced during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but simply concludes that "none of these accounts tell us anything new."<sup>195</sup> Thus, Minta primarily relies on the accounts of the Ex-Marañones and Cronistas as truthful accounts while discounting subsequent accounts as lacking any new perspective on the Basque rebel. Overall, Minta's interpretation of Aguirre concludes that he was

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 228

<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 230

<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 230

neither the revolutionary forerunner to Latin American independence presented by Ispizúa, nor the demented and insane tyrant argued by Jos. Instead, Minta grants him some sympathy in arguing that Aguirre's actions were those of a desperate and mentally competent individual whose perceived mistreatment by colonial society had left him with no other choice than to rebel. As with the earlier interpretation of Bodmer, Minta seeks to contextualize Aguirre in the circumstances of his own time. His relatively non-judgmental stance towards Aguirre's actions and awareness of the distortion of his legacy following his death signifies the trend of more recent interpretations of Aguirre to acknowledge that he is a contradictory and ambivalent figure whose actions should not be compared to present-day standards.

The final and most recent analysis of Aguirre as a historical figure to be analyzed in this chapter is Evan L. Balkan's 2011 biography, *The Wrath of God: Lope de Aguirre, Revolutionary of the Americas*. Balkan is an American-born author and scholar who received several degrees in the humanities from Towson University of Maryland, George Mason, and Johns Hopkins University. Furthermore, has held teaching positions at both Johns Hopkins University and The Community College of Baltimore, as a member of the English Department. He has written a total of six non-fiction historical books, as well as a number of novels and screenplays. According to his introduction, Balkan's interest in Aguirre arose out of a desire to address the Basque rebel's seemingly unfair historiographical and literary treatment in the centuries following his death.

As the title implies, Balkan interprets Aguirre as a revolutionary whose villainous image was primarily due to the failure of his rebellion and thus falling on the wrong side of history. In writing his comprehensive, and somewhat ambitious historical biography of Aguirre, Balkan outlines his intentions as: "to draw the man in all of his complexity, as opposed to the almost unanimous historical presentation of him as a megalomaniac. This is important because Aguirre



can be seen as America's first revolutionary as much as any other man.”<sup>196</sup> In attempting a new interpretation of this oft-told tale, Balkan argues that Aguirre's rebellion was caused by his feelings of betrayal and disenchantment by the Spanish Crown. Further, the reason why his rebellion persisted for such an extended period was that the Ex-Marañones' themselves held similar beliefs. As evidence, Balkan cites the Espinosa incident and Aguirre's participation in several rebellions as evidence that he was marginalized. Thus, his rebellion united a group of disenfranchised men who collectively supported subverting the colonial system, which had marginalized their accomplishments. Throughout his narrative, Balkan attempts to grant Aguirre a voice in his narrative by transcribing Aguirre's speeches and letters as recorded by his contemporaries as well as inventing an inner dialogue, occasionally diverging from the narrative to ponder “what must have been running through his head.”<sup>197</sup> Despite Balkan inventing some aspects of Aguirre in order to fill out his narrative, his account largely succeeds in painting a historical representation of Aguirre, complete with a thorough contextualization of his environment and granting the rebel a voice in his narrative in a manner not achieved by previous writers.

Balkan's narrative encompasses Aguirre's entire life, spanning from his departure from the Basque Country until his death at Barquisimeto. To accomplish this, Balkan utilized an impressive number of primary and secondary sources, primarily relying on the Aguirre accounts of the Ex-Marañones and sixteenth-century cronistas. Thus, his account can be considered a stitched-together narrative of multiple and occasionally contradictory sources to yield a comprehensive historical biography of Aguirre. To fill in his narrative, as well as support his presentation of Aguirre as neither a fully redeemable hero nor a villainous madman, Balkan often

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<sup>196</sup> Balkan, *The Wrath of God*, 4

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*, 109

diverges from his narrative to provide readers with related studies to show that Aguirre should not be singled out as a unique case of evil. Balkan acknowledges Lastres and Seguí's 1947 psychopathological analysis of Aguirre, in which they concluded that he did retain his mental competence and sanity throughout his rebellion. From this, Balkan argues that representations of Aguirre as a total madman, such as that of Jos, are not wholly accurate and provide an incomplete rendering of the historical figure. Furthermore, Balkan dismisses historical interpretations of Aguirre that wholly justify his murderous acts, likely in reference to Ispizúa.

Regarding attempts to dismiss Aguirre's many murders as justifiable acts, Balkan writes: "Despite the chronicler's self-interest, there is little to dispute the veracity of not only the murders but their frequency and brutality. I do not intend to rationalize or justify Aguirre's debauchery, as others have done."<sup>198</sup> Indeed, he explicitly notes Aguirre's fits of uncontrollable rage in which foam would be expelled from his mouth and his willingness to execute anyone he suspected of hindering 'his bloodstained march through the Amazon.'<sup>199</sup> According to him, Aguirre "was indeed a murderous fellow (in a time full of murderous fellows)."<sup>200</sup> In painting a new portrait of Aguirre, Balkan goes to great lengths to present him as a highly complex figure who cannot simply be characterized as a justified hero nor as a total madman. Likely referencing the competing interpretations of Jos and Ispizúa, Balkan writes:

"like most human beings, Lope de Aguirre defies easy characterization. He remains a unique figure on the landscape of early conquest in the Americas, upsetting an old order and presaging a new one. In some respects, he was a madman, and, yes, he was a

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 126

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 188

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 15

wanderer, a pilgrim, a traitor, the Wrath of God. But he was also a caudillo, a revolutionary, and -for better or worse- a leader of men.”<sup>201</sup>

As evidenced by this, Balkan attempted to carve out an interpretation of the notorious Basque that falls between Jos's total condemnation and Ispizúa's total redemption. He acknowledges that both schools of thought have some merit, though they fail to present a truly historically accurate representation of Aguirre.

Balkan fervently argues that Aguirre, through the denunciation of his loyalty to the Spanish Crown, acknowledgment of his status as a traitor and rebel, and success in leading such a large expedition of men for an extended period, was indeed a revolutionary figure whose presentation as a murderous madman does not grant the historical figure the agency he deserves. Balkan's extensive narrative of Aguirre concludes that Aguirre was both a revolutionary and arguably a predecessor to Bolívar, as well as a murderer and traitor.

Balkan's final chapter (much like this thesis), is devoted to Aguirre's convoluted legacy. He contrasts the varying interpretations and distortions of the rebel following his death. Acknowledging that the majority of interpretations of Aguirre present him as a villain, Balkan concludes that Aguirre has been consigned the title of villain in the four centuries following his death because his rebellion failed. He argues that had it succeeded, the legacy of Aguirre would likely have been viewed in a much more positive light. Overall, Balkan's interpretation of Aguirre represents the most recent movement by historians to reject the earlier historical presentations by Jos or Ispizúa uniformly. Instead, Balkan's interpretation successfully grants Aguirre a voice in his narrative and considers him a complex character who is difficult to categorize easily. That being said, Balkan's interpretation does exhibit some biases and

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 191

shortcomings. This would include (in my view) his argument that Aguirre was a predecessor to Bolívar when no such concept of Latin American independence was present in 1561.

Nonetheless, Balkan's work signifies that Aguirre's legacy is still undergoing constant reinterpretation and continues to fascinate.

This chapter shows that Aguirre's legacy underwent a dramatic transformation during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and it is still ongoing. Interpretations of Aguirre produced during this period all showed an inherent awareness of how Aguirre's legacy was repurposed by prior generations and attempted to look past such distorted representations to reveal a more historically accurate image. Nonetheless, as evidenced by the continued discourse amongst historians and authors on how exactly Aguirre should be interpreted, his legacy continues to be the subject of fervent debate, and each author's underlying motivations continue to influence their respective interpretations.

Despite writing more historical or archivally informed accounts of Aguirre than those of the nineteenth century, more Marxist leaning twentieth-century authors such as Segundo de Ispizúa, Casto Fulgencio López, and Miguel Otero Silva were influenced by their underlying beliefs. All of these authors drew parallels between Aguirre's historical rebellion and the leftist movements of early twentieth-century Latin America. Conversely, Emiliano Jos sought to discount the interpretation spearheaded by Ispizúa by providing a counter-interpretation of Aguirre as a madman and villain. During the mid-twentieth century, the analysis of Lastres and Seguíñ sought to provide a more grounded and psychologically informed interpretation of Aguirre, which did not conform to the images of the rebel provided by Jos or Ispizúa. Finally, the analyses of Beatriz Pastor Bodmer and Evan L. Balkan represent the most contemporary attitudes towards the complex legacy of Aguirre. These authors viewed him as a product of his

time, whose rebellion was not an outlying example of cruelty but part of a larger tradition of violence and rebellion in sixteenth-century colonial America.

## Conclusion

By examining the diverse and often contradictory ways in which the legacy of Lope de Aguirre has been interpreted, it is evident that history has been unkind to the Basque rebel. Multiple authors have imbued their self-interests and biases into their respective interpretations of the historical figure. As this thesis shows, the legacy of Lope de Aguirre has persisted across several centuries and has been retold in various lights by various authors for specific reasons. Many have gone beyond historical documentation to speculate on Aguirre's mental state or to assign him anachronistic urges. That is, each successive iteration of Aguirre, both historical and literary, has been influenced by the prevailing values and tensions of the period in which it was composed, with the “great rebel” reformed to suit the author's interests. Thus, the farther each iteration gets from the actual historical event, the less it reveals about Aguirre the man and the more it complicates Aguirre the legend. The first chapter of this thesis offered readers a biographical sketch of the life of Aguirre in order to better contextualize his posthumous treatment. As this chapter revealed, Aguirre was a highly complex figure who defies easy characterization. It is easy to see why he has been variously characterized as a despotic madman, the incarnation of evil, and even an idealistic (or destructive in Southey's view) revolutionary.

The second chapter dealt with the twisting of Aguirre's legacy by the Ex-Marañones, former companions who had a deeply vested interest in vilifying Aguirre to serve their self-exculpation intentions. As the case of the Ex-Marañón Gonzalo de Zuñiga showed, the purpose of the Marañones' accounts was entirely self-serving, and attempts at analyzing Aguirre went no further than assisting the author in their legal defenses and in escaping a similarly brutal fate (execution by royal decree). As evidenced by the surviving legal documents analyzed in this chapter, the Ex-Marañones' attempts at escaping punishment by vilifying Aguirre were relatively

successful. Overall, despite the clearly biased and somewhat contradictory nature of these accounts as a whole, they provide readers with perhaps the clearest glimpse of the historical Aguirre and provide the foundation for subsequent interpretations.

The third chapter focused on the image of Lope de Aguirre as presented in the writings of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century colonial cronistas. As it showed, Aguirre was unanimously condemned and vilified by authors such as Pedro de Aguado, Reginaldo de Lizárraga, and Pedro Simón and effectively transformed into a literary figure rooted both in history and the author's own intentions. The brief analyses of the authors themselves revealed that they all came from religious backgrounds and devoted significant portions of their lives in the Americas to combatting the widespread mistreatment of indigenous populations and the high degree of social inequality which were widespread across colonial society. In writing on Aguirre, they sought to repurpose his story as a moral exemplum of immoral behavior and thus instruct readers on how to behave according to the doctrines of the Church during this era. Connections between Aguirre's notably cruel and violent nature and the notion of a divine struggle between the forces of good and evil were crucial for this period's interpretations. Furthermore, the representation of Aguirre produced during this century were arguably harsher than those of the Ex-Marañones, and much like these earlier accounts, each of the colonial-era cronistas heavily imbued their own biases in constructing their respective portraits of Aguirre. At the same time, the account of Pedro Simón - produced six decades after Aguirre's 1561 rebellion - showed the immense impact he had on colonial society, even after his death.

The fourth chapter analyzed the reappropriation of Aguirre's image and legend during the nineteenth century, a period dominated by large-scale rebellions in Europe and the Americas aimed at toppling long-standing autocratic and colonial governance systems. The legacy of the

Basque rebel received a partial revival amongst prominent revolutionary thinkers, most notably Simón Bolívar, who would have perceived Aguirre's rebellion as a forerunner to the subsequent Latin American independence movements and, as such, transformed his image once again.

During the first half of this era, Aguirre's legacy was to some degree whitewashed, with many aspects of his cruel behavior redacted in order to portray him as a heroic revolutionary.

In the later nineteenth century, Aguirre received widespread attention from primarily Venezuelan authors who saw him as a uniquely Latin American figure whose rebellion was pivotal to the region's identity and history. Though he was treated as both a heroic and tyrannical individual by various authors of the “nation-building” period, his nature as a revolutionary was thrust to the forefront of each interpretation. Like many earlier interpretations, those produced during this era that emphasized Aguirre's revolutionary nature inevitably succumbed to a similar pitfall of confirming the author's biases, heavily distorting the historical figure of Aguirre in favor of reinterpreting him as a literal embodiment of current interests. That being said, he was recreated into a forerunner of Latin American identity and independence and recontextualized to fit into the era's widespread revolutionary and nationalist schools of thought.

The fifth chapter dealt with how Aguirre's legacy gained widespread attention amongst twentieth and twenty-first-century historians and authors who sought to look past the previous distortions of his image to reveal a more historically accurate understanding of the Basque rebel. This chapter showed that Aguirre's historical redemption would have to wait three centuries and be the victim of widespread fictionalization and intentional distortion up until the early twentieth century. As seen in the conflicting interpretations authored by Segundo de Ispizúa and Emiliano Jos, attempts at understanding Aguirre as a historical figure failed to produce a uniform



interpretation, and how exactly he should be understood continued to be the subject of fervent debate.

Early twentieth-century reinterpretations of Aguirre's legacy were arguably based on more historical realism in comparison to earlier attempts, though they were still heavily influenced by each author's background and intentions. As seen by the account of Casto Fulgencio López, the nineteenth-century belief in Aguirre as a forerunner to Latin American independence and nationhood continued to influence the modern understanding of Aguirre as a historical figure. In a similar vein, Aguirre's contemporaries' harsh attitude also had a pronounced impact on contrasting interpretations.

More recent interpretations of the historical Aguirre, namely those by Beatriz Pastor Bodmer and Evan L. Balkan, show that present-day interpretations of the life and legacy of Lope de Aguirre are still of widespread interest. After roughly three and a half centuries, his legacy is perhaps receiving a long-awaited historical redemption, placing his actions in the context of his times versus transplanting or refashioning them to reflect the author's contemporary ideas. That being said, it is inevitable that perceptions of Lope de Aguirre will continue to evolve and be influenced by each authors' biases and underlying ideals.

As stated in the introduction of this thesis, the purpose of this historiographical analysis of the figure of Aguirre was not to definitively present my personal interpretation of his actions. As the three centuries of repeated distortion and reappropriation analyzed in this thesis has shown, we will never have a completely accurate understanding of who exactly Lope de Aguirre was. As the rough biography of Aguirre's life presented at the start of this thesis reveals, he was a highly complex figure whose actions prevent us from easily categorizing him as strictly a hero or villain. Nonetheless, given the large body of information produced on Aguirre following his

death, we can offer several suggestions as to what Aguirre has meant to those seeking to interpret “the American experience.”

First, Lope de Aguirre is undoubtedly an important figure in the history of the early colonial era whose rebellion reveals much about the complicated nature of sixteenth-century society in the Americas. Aguirre's repeated involvement in the many rebellions which plagued Peruvian society during the period, namely those of Francisco Hernández Girón and Francisco de Carvajal, reveal a highly inequitable and violent society. Upon arriving in America, many of the second generation of Spanish peninsulares faced a stark realization that much of the Americas' fabled riches and coveted titles had already been seized and distributed amongst earlier conquistadores. Secondly, as revealed by the failures of Orsúa's expedition in search of the mythical kingdoms of El Dorado and Omagua, a growing number of these disenchanted and desperate peninsulares, many of whom had shared similar experiences to that of Aguirre, engaged in increasingly disillusioned quests to discover and conquer the next great American civilization. Upon realizing that such a place was based more on myth than reality, a rebellion was perceived as the next-best option. Thus, the life and actions of Aguirre were arguably not extraordinary, and many of the Marañones and other soldiers of fortune likely harbored similar feelings of disillusionment and anger towards the colonial system (if not the king of Spain). What set Aguirre apart and made him a particularly notable figure was that he acted on his feelings of dissatisfaction via rebellion.

Despite each generation's interpretation of Aguirre, whether as a despotic tyrant, an incarnation of evil, a strong revolutionary leader, or a disillusioned and mentally unstable individual, each has its own respective shortcomings. Each characterization selectively emphasizes or leaves out aspects of Aguirre's historical reality. Even so, they all possess some

merit. Lope de Aguirre was undoubtedly (if we can trust the general consensus) a mentally unhinged individual and a murderer whose rebellion was primarily based on his disillusionment and disenchantment with colonial society. He caused enough death and destruction during his rebellion to leave a lasting impact on colonial society. Modern estimates place the death toll of his Marañones rebellion around seventy individuals, not including the large number of indigenous porters and civilians who also perished during his campaign down the Amazon, on Margarita Island, and across Venezuela. That being said, interpretations of the Basque rebel that solely present him as a despotic madman fail to accurately acknowledge the highly complicated nature of Aguirre as a historical figure.

Based on Aguirre's surviving writings, which exhibit a surprising degree of mental competence and wit, he was much more than an insane criminal. And his actions followed a clear rationale. The fact remains that, unlike Pedro de Orsúa and Don Fernando de Guzmán, Aguirre succeeded in leading a large expedition of men through the inhospitable Amazonian environment and maintained his position of leadership for many months during his campaign across Margarita Island and mainland Venezuela. However, how he accomplished this impressive feat can be considered questionable. Aguirre was indeed a successful leader, and given the violent society from which he came, his paranoia and distrustful nature may be seen as somewhat justified given his circumstances. His earlier involvement in the rebellions of Gonzalo Pizarro and Francisco Hernández Girón undoubtedly showed him that any show of weakness or submission would lead to his brutal demise.

Thus, Aguirre's knowledge of what happened to those individuals who openly rebelled against Spanish authority had a profound influence on his actions and given that many of his fellow Marañones came from similar circumstances, Aguirre likely knew that leadership via fear

was the only means by which to maintain control over an army of experienced soldiers whose self-interest could result in a mutiny at the first show of weakness. However, despite Aguirre's act of denaturalization from the Spanish Crown, his rebellion should not be considered a predecessor to the much later Latin American independence movements, as such notions of nationhood and uniquely American identity were not present in his 1561 rebellion.

Given this, we can say that Aguirre was neither an extraordinary example of violence nor cruelty, as both were commonplace in sixteenth-century colonial society. Conversely, we can also conclude that his actions were indeed those of a somewhat mentally unstable individual whose bloody rebellion should not be considered the first act of Latin American independence. Similarly, the connections between Aguirre's Basqueness and notions of Basque nationalism, though grounded in some reality, are not fully accurate. He was indeed a Basque, and so was Orsúa, whom he killed, so Aguirre did not likely consider his Basque heritage of relevance to his overall rebellion. The push and pull continues. Lope de Aguirre and his rebellion were undoubtedly the products of a highly turbulent and violent colonial society, yet his many acts of cruelty were indeed notorious. They stood out.

In another seeming paradox, Aguirre was an undoubtedly despotic murderer but also a successful military leader. Even in his own time, many of Aguirre's actions were contradictory in nature: he had a Mestiza daughter but purportedly abandoned hundreds of Andean porters on the riverbank, and he repeatedly rebelled against the Spanish Crown though he claimed he had been a loyal vassal. It is impossible to interpret what went through Aguirre's mind during his last months, and it is likely that we will never fully know if he was aware of his many contradictions. The best we can do is to acknowledge that, like any other human, Aguirre was a complicated figure whose life was contradictory to a degree. Furthermore, he should not be judged by modern

morals or ideals, and historical analyses of him should emphasize placing his life and actions in the context of his own time. Aguirre would undoubtedly be perceived as an outsider to colonial society by his contemporaries, and as reported by Francisco Vásquez, he gained a level of notoriety across the Viceroyalty of Peru as an individual experienced in fighting and prone to fits of rage. Given the vagrant nature of his life, he was likely shunned across the region.

It is highly improbable that we will ever reach a unanimous consensus on how exactly Aguirre should be interpreted. His legacy will undoubtedly be the subject of future revisions as authors and historians alike continue to repaint him in varying lights. The highly contradictory treatment of Aguirre's legacy by the Ex-Marañones, sixteenth and seventeenth-century *cronistas*, Latin American revolutionaries and forefathers, and present-day historians and authors demonstrate that the prevailing values of an individual's era will always influence their interpretation of historical figures. Given Aguirre's highly ambiguous standing in history and controversial nature, his legacy will continue to attract attention from future generations. How could they not (like me, or Werner Herzog) be attracted to the twisted legacy and legend of “The Wrath of God?” As this thesis has shown, Lope de Aguirre is hard to avoid, whether we see him as an outlier or a “signal.” As the Ex-Marañon chronicler Francisco Vásquez foretold, “the fame of all the things he [Aguirre] had done, and all his cruelties would remain in the memory of man forever.”<sup>202</sup>

On an additional note, this historiographical analysis of Aguirre's lasting legacy also points to another important subject: the genre of historical biography. Historical biographies are narrative reconstructions of the life of a historical figure in which the author attempts to interpret and assess the meaning and significance of that individual's life. The majority of sources

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<sup>202</sup> Minta, *Aguirre, The Recreation of a Sixteenth Century Journey*, 220

analyzed in this thesis can be considered to fall into this literary genre, and akin to the complicated and often contradictory nature of Aguirre's legacy, the genre of historical biography is rife with both upsides and pitfalls. As a tool for understanding the past, historical biographies have the potential of revealing larger aspects and ideas of a period as envisioned by individuals. Conversely, this genre also has the potential to obscure such broader historical ideas as not all individuals of a historic period shared the same ideals and visions. For example, a biography of Christopher Columbus has the potential to enlighten readers on an important period in global history: the beginning of the colonization of the Americas. However, such an approach can also obscure how Columbus's actions played out beyond his intentions and fail to consider the greater implications of historical trends.

Furthermore, the manner in which historical biographies are composed is often heavily reliant on the period and place in which they're composed. Going back to the example of Columbus, biographical accounts of his life written prior to the mid-twentieth century envisioned the Genoese explorer as an important and heroic figure in the history of the Americas. Conversely, more recent biographies have granted more attention to the damage inflicted upon the indigenous American populations as a result of Columbus's actions and thus present him in a much more critical and arguably darker light.

For outlying and contradictory historical figures, such as Aguirre, the genre of historical biography has similar potential and limitations. Aguirre's life was defined by many contradictions and is overall covered by a fog of ambiguity. As such, biographical accounts of his life require an author's own judgments and interpretations to fill in the gaps. In times of rebellion or unrest, for example, Latin America's wars of independence, Aguirre's image has been redeemed as a symbol of independence and heroicized. Simón Bolívar saw an immediate

means by which to grant his own rebellion justification in the urgency of the moment.

Conversely, Aguirre's rebellion can also be imagined as an embodiment of violence and terror as depicted by Robert Southey, who expressed his own fears of the French Revolution through Aguirre. To this point, historical biographies also show a tendency for historical figures to be judged by the moral standards of the authors' own time. At the same time, Aguirre's cruelties would arguably have been considered commonplace in his lifetime. More modern morals, which view murder as the ultimate crime, would interpret them in a much harsher light. For historical figures who are clouded in ambiguity and contradictions, such as Aguirre, biographical depictions of them can vary vastly depending on the author's own ideas and intentions as well as the time and period in which they are analyzed. They have the potential to reveal a glimpse into the past and reveal larger historical trends, but they also have the possibility of distorting or obscuring larger historical patterns.

In my view, historical biographies, much as the one composed in my first chapter, are important tools for understanding both historical figures and the larger societal contexts of their lives. Through understanding the life of Aguirre, an image of a violent and somewhat unstable colonial society is revealed. However, such laser-focused analyses of an individual also expose the possibility of obscuring these very trends. For example, Aguirre's story, largely defined by his rebellion, also obscures other aspects of sixteenth-century colonial society, such as the role of the indigenous peoples in the Marañones Rebellion. Through engaging in this historiographical practice, both the difficulties of understanding historical figures and the highly complicated nature of historical biographies have become present. Regardless of the proximity to the actual period or individual, historical accounts must be taken with a grain of salt and not be accepted at face value. As a student of history, perhaps the most valuable lesson I have learned is that our

understanding of history is constantly evolving, and how we may view an individual in the present will undoubtedly change as time passes.



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