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KING AND COLONY IN PIERRE CORNEILLE'S *LE CID*

Abstract

Pierre Corneille's tragicomedy *Le Cid* often has been interpreted as the story of medieval Castile's transition from feudalism to a strong monarchy, a story that clearly resonates with France's own domestic political concerns under Louis XIII. This article focuses instead on Castile's external political engagements in the play, and how they reflect France's efforts to establish colonies during the seventeenth century. It is argued here that reading *Le Cid* alongside France's record of colonization in North America allows the play to be understood not only as an exploration of a fraught moment in French domestic politics, but also as a reflection of the kingdom's efforts to maintain and expand control over foreign lands. Several aspects of *Le Cid*—Rodrigue's duel with Don Gomès and the events surrounding it, Castile's conflict with the Moors, and King Don Fernand's mostly ineffective efforts to maintain order—appear on close inspection to have stakes for affairs external as much as internal, a feature of Corneille's tragicomedy that distinguishes it from the Spanish play that inspired it. More broadly, this article shows how accounting for France's colonization of the New World may help cast the famously insular French seventeenth century in a new and revealing light.

In act two, scene five of Pierre Corneille's famous tragicomedy *Le Cid*, the Infanta of Castile speculates about the potential outcome of a duel in progress off stage between the play's hero, Rodrigue, and the military leader Don Gomès, the Comte de Gormas,

particularly if Rodrigue should somehow manage to defeat his much more experienced adversary: ‘J’ose m’imaginer qu’à ses moindres exploits | Les Royaumes entiers tomberont sous ses lois’ (II. 5. 537-38).¹ Foreign places like Portugal, Aragon, and even unspecified territories in the middle of Africa will, the love-struck Infanta imagines, end up as conquered lands if Rodrigue emerges victorious. The prediction is striking, because the duel at least superficially has nothing to do with the world beyond Castile. Rodrigue instigates it to avenge his father, Don Diègue, who had been chosen by King Don Fernand for a prestigious appointment as governor to the prince, only to then be insulted and humiliated by Don Gomès, his unsuccessful rival for the honour. The dispute disturbs the kingdom’s peace by pitting the two prominent families against each other, tests the King’s authority over his subjects, and endangers the budding love affair between Rodrigue and his adversary’s daughter, Chimène. And yet, when the Infanta turns her imagination to predicting the outcome of the duel, she thinks not of possible consequences for familial honour or royal authority, but instead the potential future subjugation of foreigners on their own soil that could elevate Rodrigue to a position in which her own love for him might be acceptable. Later in the play, the Infanta again looks beyond Castile’s borders when predicting that Rodrigue’s success in repelling an invading army of Moors will result in their subjugation: ‘Après avoir vaincu deux Rois | Pourrais-tu manquer de couronne?’ (V. 2. 1595-96). Taking its cue from the Infanta, who

¹ Pierre Corneille, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. by Georges Couton, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), vol. 1. Although it would be interesting to account for changes introduced for the 1660 edition of Corneille’s plays, that work merits a separate study. This article focuses on the original 1637 version of the play.

always keeps one eye on the world beyond Castile, this article examines the kingdom's external politics—especially its desire to conquer foreign lands—and shows that the play's treatment of that theme resembles France's own colonial efforts in Corneille's time. In addition to casting many of the play's key scenes in a new light, this interpretation shows that the oft-studied figure of Castile's monarch, Don Fernand, may be less weak than he sometimes has been understood to be, and suggests that France's colonial projects in the seventeenth century may have more to tell us about its literature than is commonly assumed.²

Although scholars occasionally have highlighted moments in *Le Cid* when territorial expansion seems to be at stake, no one has yet systematically interpreted it from this point of view. Instead, political readings of the play have tended to see it—not without reason—as the story of a new King's struggle to assert control over his subjects, in the context of a transition from feudalism to a strong monarchy. For Michel Prigent, for example, ‘la pièce s’ouvre dans un monde aristocratique dominé par les règles de la féodalité, elle s’achève dans un univers heroïque animé par les lois de la monarchie.’³

² As Sara Melzer recently remarked, ‘[m]ost scholars of France still view colonization largely as peripheral to France’s own cultural identity, which is seen as enclosed within an insular, self-protective bubble.’ Sara E. Melzer, *Colonizer or Colonized: The Hidden Stories of Early Modern French Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p. 14.

³ Michel Prigent, *Le Héros et l’État dans la tragédie de Pierre Corneille* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986), p. 116. See also Marcus Keller, *Figurations of France: Literary Nation-Building in Times of Crisis (1550-1650)* (Newark: University of

Seen in this light, the duel and its aftermath represent a contest between two factions with differing opinions on the question of royal authority. Don Diègue supports the ascendant monarchy, and, in John Lyons's words, 'claims power through obedience to the king, rather than by reference to the privileges of an independent aristocracy.' His rival Don Gomès, in contrast, resists royal authority and 'emphasizes the king's need to conciliate the aristocracy.'⁴ By the end of the play, with Don Gomès killed and Rodrigue ascended to a new status as Castile's military hero after successfully turning back the Moorish invasion, the King's position, and therefore that of Don Diègue and Rodrigue, seems to have prevailed. Castile's internal peace is restored and Don Fernand's authority more firmly established.

Like many other aspects of Corneille's œuvre, medieval Castile's political situation in the play frequently has been understood as a reflection of that of France in the playwright's own time. Georges Couton has argued that in its military, political, social, and juridical aspects, '*le Cid* donnait bien la leçon souhaitable en son temps.'⁵ More recent scholarly interventions have confirmed comparison between 1630s France and Corneille's fictional version of medieval Castile as a potent tool for interpreting the play.

Delaware Press, 2011), pp. 131 and 163, and David Clarke, *Pierre Corneille: Poetics and Political Drama Under Louis XIII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 136 and 140.

⁴ John D. Lyons, *The Tragedy of Origins: Pierre Corneille and Historical Perspective* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 9

⁵ Georges Couton, *Réalisme de Corneille: deux études: la clef de Mélite, réalités dans Le Cid* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1953), p. 117.

To cite only a few examples, Milorad Margitić noted that ‘[Le] Cid abonde en références ou allusions à l’abolutisme royale et à la raison d’État, questions brûlantes à une époque où se forge et commence à s’imposer la politique absolutiste et étatiste qu’incarnera Louis XIV.’⁶ Noting Don Fernand’s tenuous position as the first King of Castile, Paul Scott has pointed out that the then-childless Louis XIII’s own dynastic potential and grasp on power were not as certain as they could have been, a reality that recently had been highlighted by a yearlong conflict with Spanish forces that had crossed into France in the spring of 1636 and by August laid siege to Corbie—a mere one hundred kilometres from Paris.⁷ And reading the Moors lurking just offshore and waiting to attack in relation to seventeenth-century France’s fraught relationship with the Ottoman Empire, Michèle Longino has examined how Corneille’s staging of the Moorish ‘Other’ was useful as ‘the alien yet essential coalescing force in mediating domestic politics.’⁸ Although scholars occasionally have gestured in passing at possible links between Corneille’s works and France’s budding colonial activities in the seventeenth century, those who interpret *Le*

⁶ Milorad R. Margitić, ‘Introduction’, in Pierre Corneille, *Le Cid: tragicomédie*, ed.

Margitić (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1989), p. xxxiii. See also Prigent, *Le Héros et l’Etat*, p. 116.

⁷ Paul Scott, “‘Ma Force Est Trop Petite’: Authority and Kingship in Le Cid”, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 45 (2009), pp. 292-304 (p. 293).

⁸ Michèle Longino, *Orientalism in French Classical Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 9.

Cid from a political point of view have focused exclusively on Castile's domestic situation and how it reflects that of France at the time the play was written.⁹

Fruitful though such comparisons between the domestic politics of France and Castile have been, it is worth noting that France's preoccupations in Corneille's time were not exclusively internal, but also involved the difficult matter of establishing and maintaining colonies. By the time Corneille wrote *Le Cid*, France's occasional sixteenth-century explorations by figures like Jacques Cartier, Jean-François de La Roque de Roberval, and Giovanni da Verrazano in North America, and Jean de Léry in what is today Brazil, had given way to the establishment of French settlements of varying durability throughout the world.¹⁰ French progress in this domain had been uneven, however, with periods of intense effort led by motivated kings punctuated by periods in which royal disinterest or domestic strife caused stagnation or even regression in France's

⁹ See Georges Couton's 'notice' to *Polyeucte martyr* in Corneille's above-cited *Oeuvres Complètes*, p. 1656 and Stéphanie A.H. Bélanger, *Guerres, sacrifices et persécutions: une relecture de Garnier, Montchrestien, Hardy, Corneille et Rotrou à la lumière des théories de la guerre juste* (Paris: Harmattan, 2009), p. 143. Both scholars suggest that Corneille's martyr plays could be read in light of the experiences of Jesuit missionaries in New France, for whom martyrdom was a constant possibility, a frequent subject of comment in their published texts, and an occasional reality. Unfortunately, neither pursues this line of inquiry.

¹⁰ For a brief survey of France's colonial activities in the seventeenth century, see Marcel Marion, *Dictionnaire des institutions de la France aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (1923) (Paris: Picard, 1993), p. 111-12.

efforts to extend itself beyond its borders. Sixteenth-century kings—perhaps especially François I^e and Henri II—had taken important steps in building fleets and commissioning explorers to lay the groundwork for eventual colonies, but progress was stalled for decades as their successors grappled with the Wars of Religion.¹¹ As those conflicts waned towards the end of the century, King Henri IV relaunched France's colonial efforts, overseeing in particular the founding of French settlements at Port Royal in present-day Nova Scotia in 1604 and Quebec in 1608.¹² Other settlements would appear in the following decades, notably in the Antilles and Guyane. This article, however, draws its examples from Quebec alone, because that settlement was by far the most visible to readers in France in the decades preceding the appearance of *Le Cid*, thanks to a steady stream of published reports from travellers and missionaries.¹³ The establishment of settlements like Quebec—small and vulnerable though they were—marked an unmistakable turning point in France's overseas adventures. Under Henri IV, and after decades of looking on in envy as Portugal and Spain aggressively colonized the Americas, France was finally no longer merely exploring the lands on the far side of the

¹¹ Bernard Barbiche, 'Henri IV et l'outre-mer: un moment décisif', in *Champlain: la naissance de l'Amérique française*, ed. by Raymonde Litalien and Denis Vaugeois (Sillery: Septentrion, 2004), pp. 24-26.

¹² Gilles Havard and Cécile Vidal, *Histoire de l'Amérique française* (2003) (Paris: Flammarion: 2014), pp. 62, 75-81

¹³ For a general overview of seventeenth-century French travel accounts, see Melzer, *Colonizer or Colonized*, chapter three.

Atlantic Ocean, but had taken a decisive step towards becoming a colonial power in its own right.¹⁴

By the time Corneille wrote *Le Cid*, however, France's colonial progress had faltered under King Louis XIII and his minister Cardinal Richelieu. Although the goal was set in 1627 to settle 4000 French Catholics in Quebec within fifteen years,¹⁵ that plan was derailed when British forces conquered the town in 1629 and destroyed much of what the French had built there.¹⁶ When France resumed control in 1632, it had to start building its settlement all over again, and progress was slow indeed.¹⁷ Although the accounts of travellers and colonists published in the 1630s invariably contain expressions of gratitude to the French crown and other powerful interests back home upon which the

¹⁴ Barbiche, 'Henri IV et l'outre-mer,' p. 27-29; Havard and Vidal, *Histoire de l'Amérique française*, p. 62.

¹⁵ Havard and Vidal, *Histoire de l'Amérique française*, p. 87. See also the 1627 'Acte pour l'établissement de la Compagnie des Cent-Associés', published in Marcel Trudel, ed. *La Nouvelle-France par les textes: les cadres de vie* (Montreal: Hurtubise HMH, 2003), pp. 23-30.

¹⁶ James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 38. On the circumstances surrounding this setback for France's colonial ambitions, see Andrew D. Nicholls, *A Fleeting Empire: Early Stuart Britain and the Merchant Adventurers to Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010).

¹⁷ Denys Delâge, *Le Pays renversé: Amérindiens et Européens en Amérique du nord-est—1600-1664* (Montreal: Boréal, 1991), p. 251-52.

colony relied for material support, they also frequently hint at its tenuous position, and plead for greater efforts on the part of France, lest progress stagnate or even be reversed again. A 1635 account by Jesuit missionaries, for example, devotes an entire chapter to arguing for more support for the fledgling colony. The chapter dutifully reports that the trading company charged with transporting new residents there was meeting its obligations ‘parfaictement,’ but that those efforts were insufficient: ‘quand ils feroient passer trois fois autant de personnes qu’ils ont promis, ils déchargeroient de fort peu l’ancienne France et ne peupleroient qu’un petit canton de la nouvelle.’¹⁸ Samuel de Champlain’s 1632 dedication to Richelieu of his final book, *Les Voyages de la Nouvelle-France Occidentale*, similarly begins by trumpeting the great progress made by France’s past kings, but closes by focusing on the future, in which Richelieu would give the Christian faith back to Amerindian groups ('redonnerez'), see to the reestablishment ('rétablissement') of France’s trade with distant lands including New France, and send the settlers who 's'y trouveront nécessaires'.¹⁹ Champlain’s repeated use of the prefix 're' and his use of the future tense clearly indicate the state of France’s colonial project: much had been lost, and regaining it would necessitate a future commitment of effort and resources.

¹⁸ Lucien Campeau, ed. *Monumenta Novae Franciae*, 9 vols (Rome: Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, 1967–2003), vol. 3, pp. 63.

¹⁹ Samuel de Champlain, *Les voyages de la Nouvelle-France Occidentale, dicte Canada, faits par le Sr. de Champlain où se voit comme ce pays a été premièrement descouvert par les François avec un traitté des qualitez et conditions requises à un bon et parfaict navigateur ensemble une carte et un catechisme* (Paris: C. Collet, 1632) pp. 4-5.

The basic dynamic traced above is not, as the rest of this article will show, so different from Castile's relationship to the world beyond its borders as represented in *Le Cid*.²⁰ This is not to say that Corneille was commenting explicitly on the situation in New France when he wrote his play, or that it ought to be read as reflecting specific events there. Instead, the echoes of France's colonial efforts that can be discerned in *Le Cid* may best be thought of in terms of Serge Doubrovsky's understanding of Corneille's relationship to history not as a simple factual reflection, but as the illustration of the essence of historical situations.²¹ Close scrutiny of the play in the following pages shows that like France in the 1630s, Corneille's fictional version of medieval Castile has a less-

²⁰ It is necessary to acknowledge here the trail blazed by scholars who have begun in recent years the work of examining how seventeenth-century France's relationships with the outside world may be reflected in its literature. In addition to the already-cited work of Longino and Melzer, see Ellen Welch, *A Taste for the Foreign: Worldly Knowledge and Literary Pleasure in Early Modern French Fiction* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011); Brian Brazeau, *Writing a New France, 1604-1632: Empire and Early Modern French Identity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); and Katherine Ibbett, *The Style of the State in French Theatre, 1630-1660: Neoclassicism and Government* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), especially her chapter on the figure of the colonial governor in Corneille's martyr tragedies.

²¹ Serge Doubrovsky, *Corneille et la dialectique du héros* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 269. Similarly, Longino reads *Le Cid* 'not against the coincidence of specific events, but against a socio-historical map in the Mediterranean biogeographic region of the more "longue durée.'" Longino, *Orientalism in French Classical Drama*, p.79.

than-firm grasp on its conquered territories and is struggling to maintain and expand on those advances. This resemblance resonates in the duel between Rodrigue and Don Gomès and the events surrounding it, the conflict with the Moors, and the difficulties experienced by Castile's King.

Indeed, although it is true enough that Corneille's Castile is, as noted above, in the midst of a shift in its internal balance of power, it is also—like Louis XIII's France—a kingdom with at least some past successes in expanding its territory, ambitions for more of the same, and a tenuous hold on the progress made so far. Don Fernand himself testifies to this reality when explaining why an army of Moors lurks just downriver from Seville, Castile's seat of royal power, apparently preparing to attack:

N'importe, ils ne sauraient qu'avecque jalousie
 Voir mon sceptre aujourd'hui régir l'Andalousie,
 Et ce pays si beau que j'ai conquis sur eux
 Réveille à tous moments leur desseins généreux (II. 6. 619-22).

Under Don Fernand, Castile possesses at least one territory that has been conquered from others, but the situation is unstable, as the kingdom finds itself vulnerable to seeing those gains reversed—and potentially to being conquered itself as the Moors prepare a counter-offensive. And although the King's confidant Don Arias argues that Castile has nothing to fear from the repeatedly and recently defeated Moors, Don Fernand is less sure of the durability of the victory that gave him control of their territory: 'Le même ennemi que l'on vient de détruire, | S'il sait prendre son temps, est capable de nuire' (II. 6. 631-32).

In this context, the King's controversial decision to choose the aging Don Diègue as governor to the prince instead of the younger and more robust general Don Gomès

turns out to have stakes foreign as much as domestic. Indeed, close attention to what Don Gomès says about his own military successes suggests that in addition to resisting Don Fernand's efforts to consolidate domestic authority at the expense of the aristocracy, he also may be indifferent to Castile's efforts to rule over foreign territories. While summarizing what qualifies him to serve as governor to the Prince just before humiliating the successful candidate for the post, Don Gomès trumpets his defensive posture, his efficacy in keeping Castile from being conquered by its enemies:

Et ce bras du Royaume est le plus ferme appui;
 Grenade et l'Aragon tremblent quand ce fer brille,
 Mon nom sert de rempart à toute la Castille,
 Sans moi, vous passeriez bientôt sous d'autres lois,
 Et si vous ne m'aviez, vous n'auriez plus de Rois (I. 4. 190-94).

Castile's very continued existence as an independent kingdom rests, Don Gomès claims, on his own protective stance, an assertion that both he and his daughter Chimène repeat throughout the play. After humiliating Don Diègue, Don Gomès refuses to recognize his fault and argues that the King cannot afford to punish him because 'Il a trop d'intérêt lui-même en ma personne, | Et ma tête en tombant ferait choir sa couronne' (II. 1. 383-84).

After her father is slain by Rodrigue, Chimène describes his value in similar, defence-oriented terms while urging the monarch to punish the impudent young killer, referring to the dead Comte as 'Ce sang qui tant de fois garantit vos murailles' (II. 7. 667).

Don Diègue, in contrast, appears to favour aggression towards the outside, including the eventual conquering of foreign powers, and it is in this stance that the once-

great warrior pledges to indoctrinate the King's son, using historical examples of his own exploits to mold the prince into Castile's next ruler:

Pour s'instruire d'exemple, en dépit de l'envie,
 Il lira seulement l'histoire de ma vie:
 Là dans un long tissu de belles actions
 Il verra comme il faut dompter les nations,
 Attaquer une place, ordonner une armée,
 Et sur de grands exploits bâtir sa renommée (I. 4. 179-84).

Notably, Don Diègue's summary of what he has to offer the heir to the throne insists less on defensive prowess than on offensive glory. He will not teach him to be a rampart to protect Castile from attacks, like Don Gomès, but rather to be an aggressor, to attack and dominate or subjugate ('dompter') others. Whereas Don Gomès urges that the Prince ought to be shown how to 'régir une Province' (I. 4. 168), suggesting that ruling over areas *within* Castile is the proper focus of the future King, Don Diègue intends to teach him to subdue those not already under the kingdom's control.

Although Don Diègue's fighting days are behind him—indeed, he cannot even lift his own sword to duel Don Gomès—there are signs that the outwardly-aggressive posture of the father is shared by the son who takes up arms in his place. At the beginning of the play, for example, Don Gomès himself praises Rodrigue's potential as a warrior in his father's mould: 'Je me promets du fils ce que j'ai vu du père' (I. 1. 23). Viewed retrospectively, in light of Don Diègue's own account of his military exploits, Don Gomès's comment reads not only as a compliment about Rodrigue's bravery, but also as a prediction that he will follow in the footsteps of a father who knows how to 'dompter'

les nations.' And Rodrigue himself reveals that his mind is on enemies external at least as much as internal, even when contemplating dueling another Castilian for Chimène's hand in marriage in act five:

Est-il quelque ennemi qu'à présent je ne dompte?
 Paraissez, Navarrais, Mores, et Castillans,
 Et tout ce que l'Espagne a nourri de vaillants,
 Unissez-vous ensemble, et faites une armée
 Pour combattre une main de la sorte animée,
 Joignez tous vos efforts contre un espoir si doux;
 Pour en venir à bout, c'est trop peu que de vous (V. 1. 1568-74).

At the end of the play, Rodrigue puts this preoccupation with conquering foreign enemies into action when he declares himself ready to 'Aux deux bouts de la terre étendre [s]es travaux' (V. 7. 1810) while pledging to do whatever it takes to win Chimène's forgiveness for killing her father, and just before departing on the King's orders to conquer the Moors on their own soil. Both father and son, it seems, are inclined to channel their aggression outward, instead of merely defending Castile.

Indeed, the very vocabulary used by the two would-be governors to describe Castile reinforces the notion that each perceives differently the kingdom's relationship to the outside world, even when they are not directly addressing the question of how to engage it. As quoted above, Don Gomès refers to Castile as a 'royaume' (I. 4. 190), a

term denoting a single state or territory under the control of a monarch.²² Don Diègue, in contrast, calls it an ‘empire’ while lamenting his humiliation at the hands of Don Gomès:

Mon bras qui tant de fois a sauvé cet Empire,
 Tant de fois affermi le Trône de son Roi,
 Trahit donc ma querelle, et ne fait rien pour moi? (I. 5. 240-42).

This passage could be understood as a declaration of Don Diègue’s previous service in defending Castile, particularly in light of seventeenth-century definitions of the word ‘empire’ that cast it as a synonym for ‘monarchie’.²³ But it also could be read, in light of the above analysis, as referencing a broader vision of Castile than the one espoused by the Comte, as a collection of lands ruled by a single figure. In other words, Don Diègue could be understood to be trumpeting his role in helping to maintain Castile’s broader territorial footprint—and not only the kingdom itself.²⁴ Although arguably reflecting a

²² On this point and for the following discussion of the terms ‘royaume’ and ‘empire,’ see Antoine Furetière, ‘empire’ and ‘royaume,’ *Dictionnaire universel, contenant généralement tous les mots françois tant vieux que modernes, et les Termes de toutes les sciences et des arts* (The Hague: A. et R. Leers, 1690), as well as ‘empire’ and ‘royaume,’ *Dictionnaire de l’Académie françoise* (Paris: Veuve de Jean Baptiste Coignard, 1694).

²³ Doubrovsky, for example, does not seem to read Don Diègue’s words as referencing multiple lands, but rather simply ‘l’ordre monarchique.’ Doubrovsky, *Corneille et la dialectique du héros*, p. 91.

²⁴ Keller similarly has noticed the difference in word choice between the two candidates, and persuasively reads Don Diègue’s use of ‘empire’ as the envisioning of an imaginary

defensive position, Don Diègue's boast is, unlike that of Don Gomès, one that only could result from an initial expansion of territory. Tellingly, neither Rodrigue nor Don Diègue ever call Castile a 'royaume,' and Don Gomès never opts for 'empire'. His daughter Chimène, on the other hand, does call Castile an 'empire', but only when complaining that Rodrigue's victory over the Moors has made him immune to punishment for her father's death, as if to signal the defeat of her family's vision for politics both domestic and foreign (IV. 5. 1388). Even for characters who have a clear interest in the old feudal order, Castile is no longer a mere 'royaume' once Rodrigue has won the King's favour by repelling the Moors' attack, but an 'empire'.

Even a rapid comparison of Corneille's version of the story to his acknowledged source of inspiration, Guillén de Castro's *Las Mocedades del Cid* (1618), confirms that this point of contrast between the families of Don Diègue and Don Gomès was the French playwright's own invention, as opposed to a mere remnant of previous, Spanish versions of a very old story.²⁵ In Castro's play, as in Corneille's, the two candidates for

community upon which a national identity could be built. It is understood here more literally, as a reflection of Castile's present occupation, in the play, of other lands. See Keller, *Figurations of France*, p. 144.

²⁵ The relationship between Corneille's play and its acknowledged Spanish source was a site of controversy as soon as the French play appeared, with the playwright's detractors famously accusing him, among other charges, of doing no more than translating or plagiarizing Castro's earlier play, itself based on a medieval Spanish legend. Modern scholars have had no difficulty recognizing the originality of Corneille's version of the

the post of governor evoke age and pedagogical method as points that differentiate them in the argument preceding the older man's humiliation. But neither nobleman gives any hint of difference between their respective visions of Castile's place in the world, whether while describing their past exploits or in their choice of words to designate their own homeland.²⁶ Indeed, neither character ever utters the words empire (imperio) or kingdom (reyno).²⁷ Consequently, the duel and Rodrigue's battle with the Moors do not appear, in Castro's play, to have any particular stakes for Castile's future extra-territorial endeavours. It is clear, then, that Corneille's version of the story widens the frame of the dispute over familial honour recounted by Castro to make it also a matter of Castile's relationship to the outside world. In *Le Cid*, the choice between the two candidates is not only one of monarchist versus封建ist, old versus young, or historical examples of

story. For an overview of the famous *Querelle du Cid* and an examination of the relationship between Castro and Corneille's plays, see Margitić, 'Introduction.'

²⁶ Guillén de Castro y Bellvis, *The Youthful Deeds of the Cid*, trans. Robert R. La Du, Luis Soto-Ruiz, and Giles A. Daeger (Jericho, NY: Exposition Press, 1969), p. 9.

²⁷ In Castro's play, it is only the King and his confidants who ever apply either label to Castile, and always, in the case of 'reyno' (kingdom), in the plural, testifying to a consensus view in the Spanish play of Castile as a possessor of conquered lands. In other instances, 'reyno' is applied in the singular or plural form to lands outside of the King's control. Although this article generally relies on the above-cited English translation of Castro's play, this point about the vocabulary of the two rivals relies on a Spanish-language edition: Guillén de Castro, *Las Mocedades del Cid*, ed. Luciano García Lorenzo (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1978), lines 276-77, 1841, 1852, 2454, and 2548.

valour versus contemporary ones, but also of two distinct approaches to lands and peoples outside the kingdom. It could be said that in choosing Don Diègue and snubbing Don Gomès—particularly at a moment when the Moors were lurking nearby and it may have made sense to favour the defensively-inclined Count—Don Fernand makes clear his intention to move Castile to a more aggressive footing, albeit indirectly and not explicitly, a feature of the King’s intervention that will be examined later in this article. Don Fernand opts to have his son coached not in the present, defence-oriented posture of his general, Don Gomès, but in a strategy from the past: proactive aggression against outsiders and the conquering of their lands.

Not surprisingly, the play’s characters do not immediately move to conquer outsiders on the basis of the King’s apparent will, preoccupied as they are with a matter of honour. And yet, the way each family pursues its respective claim reinforces the distinction explored above. Chimène picks up her slain father’s banner and continues to assert her family’s rights, calling for Don Fernand to ‘Sacrifiez Don Diègue, et toute sa famille, | À vous, à votre peuple, à toute la Castille’ (II. 7. 703-04). Chimène sees violence within Castile—and not outward, against foreigners—as the only solution that will serve justice and also preserve her father’s preferred balance of power. Rodrigue and Don Diègue, in contrast, look to channel their aggression towards outsiders, as the father dispatches his son to save Castile from the impending Moorish invasion in order to ensure that the King will not be able to punish Rodrigue for killing the Comte (III. 6. 1102-04). Although this strategy is not quite the domination of foreigners on their own soil that the monarch appears to desire, it is at least aggression directed towards outsiders, unlike Chimène’s plan for settling the score between the two families. As a matter of

familial honour and domestic politics, Rodrigue's success in repelling the invasion produces the intended result when Don Fernand pledges to disregard Chimène's pleas for justice: 'Crois que dorénavant Chimène a beau parler, | Je ne l'écoute plus que pour la consoler' (IV. 3. 1265-66). Rodrigue's defeat of the Moors—who honour him with the title 'Cid' in recognition of his valour—often has been seen as a decisive step forward for the King's efforts to centralize power. In Marcus Keller's recent analysis of this moment, for example, Rodrigue 'shatters the feudal order,' becoming a new kind of aristocrat 'whose unconditional allegiance to the king and the Castilians underpins the monarchy's centralization and political modernization.'²⁸

And yet, Rodrigue's conflict with the Moors also stands as proof that Castile has not yet shed the defensive posture of the now-dead Comte. Rodrigue heroically repels the invasion, but in doing so does not enact the King's—or his father's—preference for outward aggression leading to territorial expansion. This perhaps explains why it is Don Gomès, rather than Rodrigue's own father, that several characters suggest he has replaced in defeating the Moors. Urging his son to lead the battle, Don Diègue himself explicitly claims that doing so will provide the monarch with a replacement for his dead general: 'Viens, suis-moi, va combattre, et montrer à ton Roi | Que ce qu'il perd au Comte il le recouvre en toi' (III. 6. 1109-10). Echoing this assessment after Rodrigue turns back the Moors' attack, the King's own daughter, the Infanta, calls Rodrigue 'notre unique appui' (IV. 2. 1186) and 'Le soutien de Castille' (IV. 2. 1188), telling Chimène that 'ton père en lui seul se voit ressuscité' (IV. 2. 1190). The King himself describes the outcome of the battle in terms that recall Don Gomès's boasts of his own role in protecting Castile's very

²⁸ Keller, *Figurations of France*, p. 131.

existence: ‘Le pays délivré d’un si rude ennemi, | Mon sceptre dans ma main par la tienne
affermi’ (IV. 3. 1225-26). Crucially, although he has distinguished himself in battle,
Rodrigue has not yet fulfilled the Comte’s above-mentioned prediction that he will live
up to his own father’s glorious example. Instead, he has only managed to replace Don
Gomès, and it seems that despite its victory in battle, Castile remains on the defensive
footing preferred by its now-dead military leader. Indeed, as Don Arias and Don Fernand
reveal in act 2, scene 6, this is only the latest in a long series of battles with the Moors,
and there is no reason to think that the enemy will not regroup and attack again, barring
some fundamental change in Castile’s approach to the world (II. 6. 610-32).²⁹

Such a change only finally comes when Don Fernand gives Rodrigue a direct
order to go conquer the Moors on their own soil.³⁰ Scholars sometimes have understood
this moment—along with the King’s decree that Chimène will marry Rodrigue, whom
she clearly still loves, after a decent interval—as the final resolution to Castile’s domestic
problems. For Paul Scott, for example, ‘The denouement heralds a return to equilibrium
and erases the disorder brought to the state through the twin menace of domestic rifts and
the Moorish offensive.’³¹ Essential to this consolidation of the King’s power and
reestablishment of Castile’s internal peace, however, is the kingdom’s simultaneous shift
from a defensive posture to an offensive one. Conquering the Moors, the monarch asserts,

²⁹ Margitić similarly reads the Moorish peril as only ‘momentanément contenu.’ Margitić, ‘Introduction’, pp. xlii-xliii.

³⁰ Longino also interprets this moment as a shift from a defensive posture to one of territorial expansion. Longino, *Orientalism in French Classical Drama*, p. 101.

³¹ Scott, “‘Ma Force est Trop Petite’”, p. 300.

is Rodrigue's path to inducing Chimène to overcome her concerns about honour and consent to marrying him, finally putting to rest her desire to avenge her father's death: 'Et par tes grands exploits fais-toi si bien priser | Qu'il lui soit glorieux alors de t'épouser' (V. 7. 1857-58). By assenting to Don Fernand's plan and pledging to subjugate the Moors, Rodrigue confirms that one outcome of the plot will be renewed emphasis on Castile's efforts at territorial expansion, for he makes clear that if he ends up ruling over the Moors, he will only do so in service to the King: 'Pour posséder Chimène, et pour votre service, | Que peut-on m'ordonner que mon bras n'accomplisse?' (V. 7. 1859-60).³² In other words, it is only in fulfilling Don Fernand's expansionist aims that Rodrigue finally will defeat the feudal order—now represented by Chimène—and restore Castile's domestic peace once and for all.³³ Notably, this directive from Don Fernand is entirely Corneille's invention. In Castro's play, the King does not dispatch Rodrigo to conquer

³² On this point, see also Longino, *Orientalism in French Classical Drama*, p. 102.

³³ Scholars long have been divided on the question of whether Chimène is truly defeated at the end of *Le Cid*, and more particularly whether she consents to marry Rodrigue. This article does not seek to intervene in this debate at length. For the present purpose, it is sufficient to note that in the final scene, Chimène recognizes the King's authority to end her dispute with Rodrigue—'Et vous êtes mon Roi, je vous dois obéir' (1830)—and that the King, as noted above, has already pledged to stop listening to her pleas for justice. The defeat of her family's vision for Castile and her attempt to avenge her father therefore seems clear. On this scholarly debate, see C. J. Gossip, 'The Denouement of "Le Cid," Yet Again', *The Modern Language Review*, 75.2 (1980), 275-81.

the Moors, but instead exiles him to placate Ximena.³⁴ Rodrigo then pledges on his own initiative to vanquish any Moors he happens to encounter while roaming about near his home. And so it can be concluded that *Le Cid*, unlike the play that inspired it, tells the story of a return to an aggressive posture towards foreign powers after Castile's progress in expanding its territory had come under threat.

From the point of view of Castile's domestic politics, the fact that Don Fernand waits until the end of the play to act directly and forcefully to set things right in his own kingdom may be taken as yet another sign of what one scholar has termed the King's 'serio-comic impotence.'³⁵ Viewed instead through the lens of France's own precarious colonial projects in the early seventeenth century, however, Don Fernand may be thought of as less weak than simply hindered by the administrative structures of territorial expansion. In contrast to his immediate predecessor, Henri IV—who personally drove France's colonial progress in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, despite the opposition of his most influential advisers—Louis XIII delegated all or nearly all decisions related to the colonies to his minister, Cardinal Richelieu.³⁶ In the case of

³⁴ Castro y Bellvis, *The Youthful Deeds of the Cid*, p. 43.

³⁵ Christopher Braider, *Indiscernible Counterparts: The Invention of the Text in French Classical Drama* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Department of Romance Languages, 2002), p. 98. For more on Don Fernand's apparent weakness and the various challenges to his authority in the play, see Scott, “Ma Force est Trop Petite” and Margitić, ‘Introduction’, pp. xl-xliii.

³⁶ Barbiche, ‘Henri IV et l’outre-mer’, pp. 29-32; Havard and Vidal, *Histoire de l’Amérique française*, p. 68-69.

Quebec, Richelieu in turn established in 1627 the Compagnie des Cent-Associés, a consortium of merchants in whose hands were placed the civil and economic affairs of New France in return for a monopoly on trade there.³⁷ The sovereign no longer directly made plans for France's efforts to expand its colonies by the time Corneille was writing, even though they were carried out in his name. As Bernard Barbiche summarized the role of Louis XIII in France's efforts to extend itself beyond the Atlantic Ocean, 'le roi approuve, il appuie, mais il ne s'occupe pas personnellement des projets colonisateurs.'³⁸ As noted above, this system was not producing robust growth in the years leading up to the appearance of *Le Cid*. Indeed, Quebec had even been temporarily lost to the British, and after its return only a few hundred of the 4000 colonists who were supposed to arrive in the fifteen years following 1627 materialized.³⁹ In short, France's colonial goals do not seem to have been well served by Louis XIII's hands-off approach.

In light of Louis XIII's example, Don Fernand might be seen as limited at least as much by his strategy for managing territorial expansion as by any personal weakness or ineptness. Indeed, the monarch for much of the play operates at an organizational distance from his own desire to return Castile to an expansionist footing. In contrast to Castro's King, he is not present on stage for the events that set the plot in motion, and does not explicitly order or personally try to implement an expansionist policy at the beginning of the play, instead leaving his wishes to be inferred from his choice of Don

³⁷ For a brief overview of the trading company's role in New France, see Havard and Vidal, *Histoire de l'Amérique française*, pp. 86-92.

³⁸ Barbiche, 'Henri IV et l'outre-mer', p. 32.

³⁹ Delâge, *Le Pays renversé*, p. 252.

Diègue as governor to Castile's future ruler, a strategy that, as noted above, fails to shift the kingdom from its defensive posture. And whereas Castro's King witnesses—and is powerless to stop—the confrontation between the two noblemen and its aftermath, Corneille's Don Fernand remains absent from the stage, and it is instead the Castilian gentleman Don Arias who attempts to enforce his will. Don Gomès's continued obstinate refusal to recognize his fault could be seen as a sign of the King's lack of authority, but on the other hand, the Comte clearly acknowledges Don Fernand's power to have him put to death (II. 1. 363). He nonetheless declines to obey in order to preserve his own honour and because he believes that his service to Castile outweighs his crime. Whether Don Gomès would have refused an order from the monarch's own mouth is unknowable, but Don Arias suggests that it not Don Fernand's power that has proven insufficient to keep Don Gomès in line, but his own. Don Arias reports to the King: 'Je l'ai de votre part longtemps entretenu, | J'ai fait mon pouvoir, Sire, et je n'ai rien obtenu' (II. 6. 561-62). He specifies that he was acting on behalf of the King, but that it was his own power that was operative—and insufficient—in the conversation with Don Gomès. Enraged by Don Gomès's insolence, Don Fernand finally appears on stage and dispatches another proxy, Don Alonse, to take care of the problem (II. 6. 570-74). This order is rendered moot by Rodrigue's decision to duel Don Gomès, but it nonetheless confirms the pattern: in the matter of his selection of a governor and the foreign policy preference that is implied by that choice, Don Fernand prefers for much of the play to let others speak and act on his behalf. As in Corneille's version of the story, Castro's ruler struggles to impose his will—lamenting at one point that he is 'a poorly obeyed king'—but he at least issues

orders directly, and attempts personally to resolve the dispute between the two noblemen.⁴⁰

As this article has shown, the story that so often has been seen to resonate with France's own on-going process of political centralization also turns out, on close examination, to recall its tenuous hold on foreign territories and the limitations of the King's strategy for managing that effort. Like Louis XIII, Don Fernand wants his kingdom to keep its new territories and acquire more in the future, but for much of the play he leaves to others the matter of turning desire into reality. The fact that Castile only moves to take aggressive—rather than defensive—action against outsiders when the monarch issues a direct order could be interpreted as an argument that such enterprises are best served by direct royal oversight, of the kind that had been favoured to relatively good effect by Henri IV. Indeed, in pointing to the limitations of the King's hands-off approach to questions related to territorial expansion, Corneille would prove prescient. Whereas France had just barely begun to repopulate New France in the mid-1630s after the brief British takeover mentioned above, the reign of his son Louis XIV roughly coincided with an acceleration of royal efforts to enlarge and stabilize the colony over the following two decades. While only 296 settlers arrived between 1608 and 1639, 964 arrived between 1640 and 1659, testifying to the fact that the colony—although still small—was on firmer footing than it had been during Louis XIII's reign.⁴¹ Louis XIV

⁴⁰ Castro y Bellvis, *The Youthful Deeds of the Cid*, p. 11. In the original Spanish, the King laments: ‘Rey soy mal obedecido [...].’ Guillén de Castro, *Las Mocedades del Cid*, line 304.

⁴¹ Delâge, *Le Pays renversé*, p. 252.

and his minister Colbert took a more direct role over colonial affairs than the King's father had, notably by making New France into a royal province, producing the rapid growth that had proved elusive to Louis XIII and the proxies who had been charged with governing the colony on his behalf.⁴² The settlement that had barely 3000 inhabitants in 1663 ballooned to some 16,000 by the end of the century.⁴³ One explanation for the fact that Corneille's King seems more in control in the revised 1660 edition of the *Le Cid* therefore may be that France's stronger colonial position, driven at least in part by a more active crown, had lessened the need to point out the drawbacks of Don Fernand's—and by extension Louis XIII's—consistent delegation of royal authority.⁴⁴

In addition to casting a single classic work of French literature in a new light, the interpretation of *Le Cid* offered here challenges the common scholarly assumption that seventeenth-century France's efforts to settle and draw material wealth from distant corners of the world were almost completely unrelated to its literature. That longstanding notion is understandable enough in light of the fact that seventeenth-century French literature, in contrast to its Spanish and English counterparts, is strikingly silent on the subject.⁴⁵ Indeed, Gilbert Chinard's classic study of how the Americas shaped early-

⁴² Havard and Vidal, *Histoire de l'Amérique française*, p. 99.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 67, 98.

⁴⁴ On Corneille's changes to the character of Don Fernand between the 1637 and 1660 versions of the play, see Margitić, 'Les deux Cid: de la tragi-comédie baroque à la pseudo-tragédie classique', *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature*, 11.21 (1984), 409-25.

⁴⁵ Melzer, *Colonizer or Colonized*, p. 17.

modern French literature and thought foregoes analysis of any of the best-known authors of the seventeenth century in favour of utopian novels, because those comparatively obscure texts are the only ones that seem to engage directly with France's exploration and colonization of distant lands.⁴⁶ As Sara Melzer has suggested, this failure of the period's most famous works of literature to mention the Americas seems to have 'caused most literary scholars to assume that France's colonial endeavours were completely disconnected from its internal concerns.'⁴⁷ And yet, the case of *Le Cid* shows that even in the absence of explicit references to France's overseas adventures, they may lurk in the background of the period's literature, and that reading prominent works alongside France's colonial record may help cast the reputedly-insular French seventeenth century in a new and revealing light.

⁴⁶ Gilbert Chinard, *L'Amérique et le rêve exotique dans la littérature française au XVII^e et au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Droz, 1934).

⁴⁷ Melzer, *Colonizer or Colonized*, p 17.