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Item Type	Essay
Authors	DeStephano, Mark
Publisher	Centro de Publicaciones Académicas, Facultad de Artes y Ciencias, Universidad de Puerto Rico en Mayagüez
Download date	2025-02-15 11:14:21
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11801/3225">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11801/3225</a>

**JUAN DE MIRAMONTES'S *ARMAS ANTÁRTICAS*,  
EPIC, AND THE CATECHETICAL TRADITION  
OF THE COUNCIL OF TRENT AND THE  
COUNTER-REFORMATION**

*Mark DeStephano*

**J**uan de Miramontes y Zuázola's *Armas antárticas*, an epic poem probably written during the years 1609 to 1614, has generally been understood by the few critics who have studied it to have been modeled on the European literary epics of the later Renaissance period. Most recent studies by Nina Gervassi-Navarro (1999), José Antonio Mazzotti (2001), and Paul Firbas (2006) locate the poem within the genre of "pirate" and/or "creole" literature in the Hispanic-American context, as the work treats, in large measure, of the struggle between the Spanish conquistadors and the English corsairs Francis Drake, John Oxenham, and Thomas Cavendish. In her study, Gervassi-Navarro remarks that "(These works) are also about Catholicism battling against Protestantism, precisely at the time when—as a result of the Counter-Reformation—this battle had taken center stage among European States" (54).

This essay will develop Gervassi-Navarro's insight, and will demonstrate how and why the *Armas antárticas* puts the epic genre at the service of the Council of Trent, and is not only a thrilling story of Catholic heroism, but also a catechetical work aimed at the target audience of Spanish warriors. Miramontes has written a Counter-Reformation tract that describes, in great detail, what is expected of the model Catholic sailor and soldier, who the "enemy" is and why, and what theological principles are at stake in the struggle. Studied from the point of view of the Counter-Reformation, *Armas antárticas* is seen to be much more than a heroic tale about confronting the English and Dutch heretics; it exemplifies, in language that is markedly that of the Counter-Reformation, precisely how and why the Spaniards are admirable servants of the Catholic Church militant. What is more, *Armas antárticas* attests to Miramontes's remarkably profound knowledge of Tridentine theology as well as to his understanding of the cultural

goals of the Council, which give birth to the Counter-Reformation. H. Outram Evennett summarized those Counter-Reformation cultural goals as follows:

These two aspects of counter-reformation piety—the efforts of personal ascèse, the ‘disciplined life of religious regularity’, and the recourse to the covenanted channels whence flowed divine Grace *ex opere operato*—are seen once more to come together ... The revival of the sacramental life, the spread and development of powerful new techniques of meditative prayer and eucharistic devotions, the driving urge towards outward activity and good works as a factor in personal sanctification, all deployed, as it were, within the framework of Tridentine doctrine. (40)

Just how the decrees of the Council would be implemented and integrated into the cultural life of the nation was the task and prerogative of each Catholic monarch.

None of the European Catholic monarchs was more zealous in the adoption of the decrees of the Council of Trent than Philip II of Spain (r. 1554-1598), who promptly obeyed the decree of Session Twenty-Five of the Council by ordering the promulgation of its decrees. Although in his 1969 study of the Counter-Reformation, historian A.G. Dickens argued that Philip did not publicize the decrees of the Council for a full year, this opinion was refuted by Henry Kamen in 1997, when he noted that Pope Pius V formally issued the conciliar decrees in June 1554, and that on July 12—two weeks later—Philip promulgated them as Spanish law (104). He was the first European monarch to do so. Kamen further explains that Philip’s acceptance of the papacy’s policies was not complete, in that he published the decrees of the Council in matters of faith and Church discipline, but refused to relinquish the Crown’s supremacy over the Spanish clergy (104).

The Spanish king vigorously instituted the reform measures agreed upon at Trent throughout his realms, and in the American colonies, through the Council of the Indies. J.H. Elliott observes that, particularly during the 1560s, Philip turned his attention to the Council of the Indies and sought to impose the order, discipline, and conformity decreed at Trent on the entire Spanish missionary enterprise (128). This was especially significant in that Pius V had made a special concession to Philip, allowing him to establish a religious “*Patronato*” in the Indies, which declared that the Church and the State were to share the mission of evangelization in the New World (Elliott 128). Philip further strengthened the authority of the Spanish Crown in the Americas during the 1570s by establishing the “*Estado de las Indias*,” an all-encompassing governmental system which was to implement Madrid’s policies, especially in matters religious, without deviation (Elliott 129-130).

Fully aware of the advances the Protestant heresy was making in the Netherlands and France, and wishing to protect his own realm, Philip had already instituted a series of laws between 1558 and 1559, which forbade Castilians from studying outside of Spain. Furthermore, in accordance with the “Decree on the Choice of Books” of the Eighteenth Session of the Council of Trent, those works judged to be heretical were to be purged from the land and schismatic Spaniards were to be extirpated; foreign books were to be stopped at the borders, an order that proved difficult to enforce. The Holy Office was to lead the campaign against both Judaizing and Protestant heresy.

Philip had made it clear to his officials that the propagation of the purest form of the Roman Catholic faith was to be the centerpiece of the colonial Spanish enterprise, and was in no way to be compromised for reasons of economic advantage (Lea 191). In 1570, by direct order of the king, the Holy Office established a seat at the capital city of the Viceroyalty of Peru, which, according to Miramontes’s poem, had been named for the river valley where it was located, “Rihac” or “Lima,” and was also called the “City of the Kings” (la “Ciudad de los Reyes”) in honor of the Three Magi (75g-h). Miramontes had served for twenty years as an officer in the naval fleet that had patrolled the coasts from Chile to Panama in search of heretical English and Dutch corsairs (Firbas, Introductory 22). Born in Spain, he had distinguished himself in his military service, and in 1604 Miramontes was awarded the title of “Gentleman Harquebusier of the Viceroy’s Guard” (“Gentilhombre arcabucero de la guarda del virrey”), a promotion that led him to settle in Lima in 1607 (Firbas 2006: 18-19).

In his dedication of the *Armas antárticas* to don Juan de Mendoza y Luna, the Marquis of Montesclaros and Viceroy of Peru from 1608 to 1615, Miramontes clearly states his purpose in writing the poem: “(... but) I take courage in my intention, that the deeds of the most valiant Spaniards in conquering, subduing, and defending this kingdom, which they performed in the service of Your Majesty, deeds worthy of their nation, not be lost in the darkness of oblivion, whose memory silence buried” (“mas cobro ánimo en mi intención, que fue no quedasen oscurecidos en las tinieblas del olvido los hechos de muchos valientes españoles que en conquistar, quietar y defender este reino hicieron en servicio de su Majestad obras dignas de su nación, cuya memoria sepultaba el silencio”). Thematically, the epic of twenty cantos of *octavas reales* (strophes of eight hendecasyllables rhyming ABABABCC, DEDEDEFF, etc.) is divided into four parts: (1) the Conquest and Civil Wars (I-II); (2) the Pirates, Drake and Oxenham (III-X); (3) the Loves of Chalcuchima and Curicoyllor (XI-XVII); and, (4) the Population of the Straights and the Pirate Cav-

endish (XVIII-XX) (Firbas 2006: 32). Miramontes organized the poem in such a way as to be a fine Counter-Reformation catechetical work, not in the sense of a formal *cartilla*, or list of doctrines, but rather as a literary work through which Tridentine decrees might be communicated to soldiers and sailors of the Spanish empire. And while colonial Spanish officials worked closely with ecclesiastical authorities to create educational and catechetical programs that would bring the indigenous peoples of the empire into the fold of Christ, of equal importance was the work of the civil authorities and the Inquisition to strengthen the faith and keep the New World free of the schismatic doctrines of the Protestant Reformers.

*Armas antárticas* addresses seven essential aspects of the Counter-Reformation cultural project: (1) the supremacy of God's Will as that of the Creator of everything and the provident guide of history; (2) God's choice of Spain as the pre-eminent Catholic power in the world and the defender of the Catholic faith; (3) affirmation of the Spanish monarchs as the rulers who had been charged with the defense of the Catholic faith; (4) condemnation of Lucifer, who wishes to destroy the Church's work, especially in the New World; (5) demonstration of God's desire to save the indigenous peoples; (6) anathematizing of the Protestant heresy; and, (7) the teaching of doctrine, especially as it was expressed through the decrees of the Council of Trent. Miramontes's work, which in large measure is a recounting of the history of the Viceroyalty of Peru, remains quite faithful to historical fact and chronology.

In his presentation of the will of God, Miramontes addresses a variety of issues. In numerous instances, he reminds his listener that God favors the Spanish cause and prospers Spain's civil and ecclesiastical work, especially because of its efforts to bring the faith to the peoples of the New World (548;884;892;1521). God has given the Indies to Portugal and Spain for evangelization (349), yet Miramontes echoes a haunting Spanish question: If Spain is the champion of the proper cause, why does God allow the English corsairs to be successful, especially if the booty they capture aids the cause of evil? (696;762). God has even allowed the destruction of Peru (1206). In true Tridentine fashion, these doubts are answered in theological terms. We cannot know the will of God, nor is our will God's will; we must trust in His goodness (240;1508-1509;1545-1546). It must also be pointed out that, in numerous instances, Miramontes conjectures that God has not fully punished Drake and his associates because the English have shown extraordinary kindness to their defeated nemeses. Drake neither executes his enemies nor even sinks their ships, and, very often, even cures Spaniards who have been

wounded in battle and captured! (682-684;693-695;1585). Spanish warriors are taught the examples of how God punishes the Incas, who refused to accept the true faith, as well as how He destroys the rebellious Spaniards who seek to overthrow the proper order because of their own avarice and pride (31;50-61). Even the great conquistador Pizarro, who served the Crown well with the sword, became too confident and was punished by God with death by the sword (62). Likewise, we hear the positive example of Esteban Trexo, who gave thanks to God for granting him victory (931). The conclusion, which is vigorously affirmed by Canon XI of the Thirteenth Session of the Council, rings in the words of naval commander Pedro de Arana, who searches for the heretical corsairs so as to destroy them, if this be the will of God, and following the example of God's strengthening of Joshua and Moses in the Hebrew Scriptures (1655-1656).

Much of Miramontes's art as a secular Counter-Reformation catechist is evident in his ability to embed numerous Tridentine theological doctrines in discourses of the poem's characters. Closely examined, we find that he has carefully included most of the principal teachings of the Roman Catholic faith that have been deemed essential for salvation. For example, early in the epic the poet explains that the Spaniards sought to impart to the Incas an understanding of God as the Creator of all things:

Following Evangelical doctrine,  
 first they instituted peace  
 and then of the revealed divine faith  
 gave clear, holy, and detailed teaching,  
 saying that He who illumines everything,  
 by whom the high heavens were created  
 from the void, the starry firmament,  
 the light, the fire, earth, sea and wind ... (19)

In an interesting Counter-Reformation image, Miramontes proclaims that the same God sent His Son as a "Vicediós" ("Vice-God"), as well as Peter, who occupies the "Holy Chair" and also the king of Catholic Castile to bring the faith to all lands (23). God endowed human beings with reason and understanding (185) and yet their own ambition, pride, greed, and violence bring about the loss of peace and the destruction of the land, which, in turn, disturbs the proper worship of God (182;185). In a clear reference to the very decree of convocation of the Council of Trent, Andrés Hurtado de Mendoza, third Viceroy of Peru, declares that only peace and justice give rise to progress (187). The only legitimate war, he announces, is that which is fought "... that all should adore the Christ God as the king of glory" (188). Wars supporting the faith are just, however the current civil wars between ambitious Spaniards who are jockeying for power

are an affront to God Himself (188-189). As Pizarro's bloody death reminds us, violence begets violence (119). Only careful worship of God can help to us think and act properly.

One of the most important affirmations of the Council of Trent was that of the efficacy of good works, as opposed to the Reformers' teaching that salvation came *solá fide*—through faith alone. On many occasions Miramontes insists on this central Counter-Reformation teaching of Chapter Seven of the "Decree of Justification" issued by the Sixth Session of the Council. God provides human beings with situations that are opportunities to perform good works, and through them, to cooperate with God's plan of salvation for them. The poems reminds us that even the birds sing in praise of God, and so, Spanish warriors must do their part in fighting against the enemies of God's Holy Church (550-551). Marshal Ballano urges his men to make their good deeds be memorable, by fighting against the enemies of the Catholic King and the Holy See (563). In the name of their Catholic monarch, Philip, the English heretics must be punished (565). Let all true Spaniards shout, "¡Santiago, y cierra España!" and take to the battlefield with trust in God (566).

*Armas antárticas* also frequently reminds soldiers that we must always be prepared for death. In the first cantos, the poet recalls that the mission of the Spaniards in the New World is to preach Christ—true God and true man—, who has been sent by the Father to bring His grace and His light, and to free all peoples from death (24). Commander Valverde invokes the God of the Red Sea, who chose to save the seemingly insignificant Hebrew people and make them His own Chosen People (29-30). Miramontes offers the case of the Dominican preacher Vicente Valverde, who constantly preaches the sufferings of Christ (25), and later presents the inspiring story of Father Costantino of the Holy Office, who died a martyr at the hands of the heretics (501-503). Yet this glorious martyr is given the gift of eternal life immediately, the best that we can all hope for, as we are all come from ashes and to ashes we shall return (493;503). Therefore, let all Spanish warriors first confess their sins, do penance, and then head off to punish the schismatic English (547). No catechism could have offered a clearer teaching of Chapter V of the "Decree on the Most Holy Sacraments of Penance and Extreme Unction," which was issued at the Fourteenth Session of the Council.

Another significant doctrinal area addressed by Miramontes is that of the pernicious quest by Lucifer to undermine the work of the Holy Catholic Church, especially in the New World. Lucifer has sought to usurp God's glory (1516) and he now makes use of the English queen and her corsairs to attack the faith (282). The poet explicitly

mentions the ruin caused by England's Henry VIII, who, because of his pride and avarice, brought schism, war, furor, and death (200). Henry's apostate realm is the home of Drake, who, although a mighty warrior, is driven by heretical thought (199-203). In their misguided arrogance, the English and Lutherans burn Catholic churches everywhere and are like bloodthirsty wolves seeking to prey on innocent Catholic settlements throughout the New World (500;552;1194). Drake sows even greater disaster by urging his underlings, John Oxenham and Thomas Cavendish, to wreak havoc on the Spaniards and their faith (748;1611-1613). Following the great call of the "Decree Regarding the Opening of the Council of Trent," Miramontes makes it clear, time and again, that Spaniards are called to combat heresy, extirpate it, and punish the offending parties. God punishes the schismatics by having the sea swallow them and allowing thousands of them to be slaughtered in battle (455-456;472;1559;1697). The Spaniards' indignation and hatred of the Lutherans, he declares, is justified (853-854).

For this reason, Spain and its monarchs—the defenders of the Catholic faith—must decisively defeat the heretics, especially in the New World. God provides His help in this great task, as the Spanish warriors are bearers of Christ's standard (17-18;724;1527). For this, they were baptized in Christ, and now they are called upon to proclaim their faith in God and in the Holy Roman Catholic Church, to both of which the warriors resoundingly assent (1582-1583). The warriors are missioned to help their king establish the Catholic faith throughout his realms, for, indeed, the king—the *Señor Natural* of the realm—commands all of his vassals to join in this holy struggle (725;1526;1660). Had not Pope Alexander VI given the New World to the protection of Spain and Portugal, first by a Bull of 1493 and then, more formally, through the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494? This is why Magellan sailed the globe, just as he had explained to Emperor Charles V of Spain (241). His successor, Philip, must fight not only the English heretics, but even the nefarious French, who deal illicitly with the faithless schismatics (1529). The Council of Trent speaks directly to this conflict.

Reviewing the structure of *Armas antárticas* in the light of what has been presented, Miramontes's Counter-Reformation plan becomes clear. He first discusses the supremacy of God's will and teaches that human beings must be obedient to it, both in the ecclesiastical and the civil order. God has punished the infidel for his lack of faith and his crimes against the Natural Law, and the Spaniards have been sent to bring the true faith to the indigenous peoples, whom God wishes to save. English corsairs, most notably Drake and Oxenham, have



joined with African slaves to foment rebellion against the Spanish Empire throughout the New World. Their evil deeds must be opposed. The section on the loves of Chalcuchima and Curicoyllor is written with one specific apostolic purpose; all of the Indians have joined together in a great meeting, at which point Rumiñave, an old Inca sage, prophesies: "... the high personages you have seen here / will be an illustrious and important nation / that will adore Christ the Word as God-Made-Man" ("... los altos personajes que aquí has visto / serán de una nación ilustre y grave / que por Dios Hombre adora al Verbo Cristo") (1142). The pure, natural love of the two young people demonstrates the potential of the Incas to be easily introduced to the Catholic faith. Finally, these good people and their lands must not be abandoned to the destruction, heresy, and damnation of the English corsairs, who, as agents of Lucifer, seek to bring the indigenous peoples to their everlasting perdition.

*Armas antárticas*, then, should not be judged simply as a minor heroic work of the "pirate" genre, but, as we have seen, should rather be considered as what might arguably be the key exemplar of Counter-Reformation epic in the Hispanic-American context. Miramontes has created the ideal Counter-Reformation literary masterpiece that joins history, Tridentine doctrine, Spanish nationalism, and Roman-Catholic militancy in a way that reaches an audience that might very well be poorly catechized, namely, the soldiers and sailors of the Spanish empire.

*Mark DeStephano*  
Saint Peter's College  
United States of America

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