
M. Carmen Gómez-Galisteo, Early Visions and Representations of America: Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's Naufragios and William Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation

Anna Diamantouli



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/11168>
DOI: 10.4000/ejas.11168
ISSN: 1991-9336

Publisher

European Association for American Studies

Electronic reference

Anna Diamantouli, "M. Carmen Gómez-Galisteo, Early Visions and Representations of America: Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's Naufragios and William Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation", *European journal of American studies* [Online], Book reviews, document 2, Online since 17 February 2016, connection on 31 August 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/11168> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.11168>

This text was automatically generated on 31 August 2022.



Creative Commons - Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International - CC BY-NC 4.0
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

M. Carmen Gómez-Galisteo, *Early Visions and Representations of America: Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's Naufragios and William Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation*

Anna Diamantouli

REFERENCES

New York: Bloomsbury, 2013. Pp. 224. ISBN: 978 1 4411 0382 6

- 1 This absorbing book brings together two works written by two seemingly dissimilar figures who share the experience of finding themselves in “an unknown land whose reality they could hardly grasp” (x) and who were pioneers in their experiences of America. Cabeza de Vaca, a “failed conquistador looking for lands to annex to the emergent Spanish empire” and Bradford, an “Englishman whose religious beliefs made his community the object of ... intense persecution,” both left written testimonies of America, in an attempt to come to terms with the foreign environment that they encountered. Gomez-Galisteo’s aim is to compare how both authors reshaped many of their previous ideas, and attempted to “accurately record America in the absence of a genre that fulfilled their needs.” (x) “Gomez-Galisteo’s aim is not only comparative though. She is interested in redefining the scholarship of

Early-America by moving away from a restrictive Anglo-centric focus and including Spanish-American aspects and accounts of the colonization process (xii).

- 2 The first three chapters provide an excellent historical and literary background of the two works, an examination of eye-witness accounts, their credibility and veracity, and the representations of America both before and after 1492. These chapters provide the strong foundation on which chapters four and five build, as they explore the representation of America in *Naufraios* and *Of Plymouth Plantation* more specifically and in more depth. The analysis of the two individual texts is brought together in Chapter Six, which offers an overview of the historical consideration of the two texts; the strategies employed to assert their credibility and the reasons behind the often dissimilar approach to these two works.
- 3 By exploring a number of select Spanish- and English-language works, including Gonzalo de Oviedo's *Sumario de la natural historia de las Indias* (1526), a contemporary Portuguese account by Hidalgo de Elvas, as well as John Smith's *A Description of New England* (1616) and Mourt's *Relation* (1622), Gomez-Galisteo's book is particularly useful in summarising the multiplicity of visions of America that existed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She explores the powerful vision of America as a terrestrial paradise, often biblical in its associations, a notion that was closely intertwined with the idea that America was "suspended in a golden age, long ago vanished in Europe." Gomez-Galisteo here engages with the notion of going to the colonies as returning to the "golden age, the mythical origins of the world, when everything had been pure, idyllic and perfect" (59). She shows how both conquistadors and first explorers interpreted such myths and ideas in their works, combining both their perceptions and expectations (79), and reconciling such notions with the difficulties and often harsh realities of experiences in early America.
- 4 The usefulness of an engagement with both Cabeza de Vaca's and Bradford's texts becomes evident in the questions it raises as to how Bradford has achieved "unquestionable historical status and legitimacy" while Cabeza de Vaca's account is neglected and its historical significance questioned because of de Vaca's background and education and on the grounds that it was an eyewitness account. Gomez-Galisteo reconciles these two responses by arguing that while *Of Plymouth Plantation* is considered the

work of both an eyewitness and historian, *Naufragios* is often seen as the work of an eyewitness “attempting to usurp the role of a historian” (148). Here the move away from an Anglo-centric focus enables Gomez-Galisteo to establish that while Cabeza de Vaca and Bradford shared a similar eyewitness status, their “personal circumstances and [the] different historiographical traditions to which they belonged” led to differing responses. One was praised and the other neglected often on account of the same features (161).

- 5 Gomez-Galisteo thus takes a first step towards revising the scholarship of Early-America by comparing works from the Spanish and English traditions and showing how they shared a common repository of, ideas, images and impressions of America. Despite such steps, as *Early Visions and Representations of America* concludes, there is still a considerable amount of work to be accomplished in redressing the Anglo-centric focus of colonial studies and granting it a multi-national focus.

AUTHOR

ANNA DIAMANTOULI

Department of English, King's College, London