The newness of the New World proved a challenge for the archivists of the Americas. Here I am alluding to a simple notion of archive: that of a mechanism that stores and organizes a documental body which, in turn, historicizes and defines the institution to which the archive belongs. There is, of course, nothing simple about this —starting with the fact that the archive is required to contain the fundamentals of the institution that contains the archive itself. But even if one overlooks this circularity and takes this definition for granted, a critical problem arises in the context of the Americas. Archives tend (perhaps the right word is aspire) to be old. Archives are more venerable when they host and process the attributes of the archaic. Once they acquire the condition of repositories of archaic knowledge, archives become precious, precarious, and, in their most extreme forms, sacred —hence the historical veneration of the Alexandrine library and the pious reports of its tragic end, the fragility of the unarranged leaves dispersed in the cave of the Sybil, or the sacrosanctity of the Ark of the Covenant. These archives contained the Old, which in a way also rendered them, as recipients, equally old. All this collides with the New World, whose newness destabilizes and even sabotages the robust historical density of the archive.

The realization of this aporia is not new, and I will later refer to important theoretical antecedents in the description of this phenomenon (in particular, to what Jacques Derrida has to say about archives, facts, and origins). I wish, however, to begin by highlighting the linkages between antiquity, knowledge, and authority because the cultural anxieties experienced by colonial American intellectuals often translated into a
dramatization of the tension between newness and archive. Despite the vast and complex traditions that articulated the cultural fluxes of America long before the arrival of the Europeans, the colonial newness forcefully imprinted on the New World rendered its recordable history, under the light of those colonial paradigms of diachronicity, comparatively short with respect to the millenarian self-representations of the Old World. Colonial literati, of course, would be especially sensitive about this construct. Very few, however, would express such anxiety with the intensity manifested by the intellectual on whom this paper focuses: the 18th-century Peruvian polygraph Pedro Alejandrino de Peralta Barnuevo Rocha y Benavides.

In what follows, I explore Peralta’s self-fashioning as a primal archivist of the New World, and discuss the attributes through which his intellectual persona was characterized within his academic milieu. This analysis will help us evaluate his role as epistemological agent in his most famous work, *Lima fundada* (1732). An archive in its own right, *Lima fundada* is a vast epic poem that combines an account of the conquest of Peru with a meticulous report of the historical events and material achievements of the first 200 years of Lima’s existence. Keeping in mind the features of Peralta’s authorial persona, I interrogate the highly heterogeneous material composing the poem and propose the critical consideration of four textual oddities that distinguish *Lima fundada* with respect to the conventions of the epic genre. Such anomalies, I argue, dramatize the tension between the old and the new in its archival modulation. In evaluating the peculiar adaptation of his subject to the classical topoi of epic narratives, I posit that Peralta purposely redefines the attributes of the archive in the New World by instilling them with what could be called an elastic capacity. In theorizing this elasticity as a rhetorical flexibility that strategically reconfigures the ideologeme of the “brief history” of the New World, I ultimately seek to provide a point of reference to rethink the role of other “archival gestures” in the subsequent literatures of Latin America.

**The Archivist**

Peralta is one of those characters that most Latin American colonialists have heard about and few have addressed—a peculiar and an undue fate, since he was, arguably, the leading intellectual figure of his time. With

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2 It is important to remark, however, that the ideologeme of “Newness” by no means nullified, as the recent work of colonialists such as Anna More have stressed, the parallel appropriation and metabolization of “older elements” of the New World—namely, Amerindian and pre-Hispanic narratives, rituals, and cultural artifacts, which also obsessed colonial intellectuals.

3 Still, it is fair to highlight the critical energy invested on the study of Peralta by several scholars. Among these are Renee Gutiérrez—mentioned above—, Ruth
dozens of books exploring a plethora of subjects, scholarly and literary alike, and in eight different languages, Peralta accomplished the extraordinary feat of overcoming his relatively humble origins and becoming a key player in the colonial milieu essentially by virtue of his scholarly prowess.4

How was a colonial intellectual who could authoritatively write on so many subjects perceived by his contemporaries? The question is important, since Peralta’s own intellectual persona was, as we will see, coterminous with the archival project he undertook. Yet it is also a complex question, for appraising the judgment about Peralta by his fellow academics requires sifting through a plethora of formulaic hyperboles, extravagant similes, and other protocols typical of the Baroque. Beyond the standard fare of stock tropes, however, two attributes consistently used in Peralta’s praise appear to possess a more concrete referential value: the listing of the many and varied subjects he mastered, and the commendation of his polyglot skills. Here is, for example, the long paralipsis with which Joseph de Peralta extols his brother Pedro in the preliminaries of the latter’s Historia de la España vindicada:

Y assi no diré, hermano, que no ay cosa de las mas relevantes en las mas altas Ciencias, que sea superior a tu genio; nada mysterioso en la Politica,

Hill, Eva Kahiluoto, José Antonio Mazzotti, Jose Antonio Rodríguez Garrido, Mark Thurner, and Jerry Williams (the latter being particularly important, as he has taken care of numerous modern editions of Peralta’s works). In spite of this, there is still a significant imbalance between the key role that Peralta played in his time and the relatively scarce modern scholarship (especially monographic) devoted to him—and in fact, many of the critics cited above have taken a moment to explain Peralta’s literary unpopularity.

4 The variety of topics on which Peralta wrote is so vast that one of his admirers, Carlos Sedamos Saldías y Spinola, composed an acrostic in which each letter of the phrase “El Doctor Don Pedro de Peralta Barnuevo Rocha y Benavides” represented the initial letter of one of Peralta’s book titles (Helmer 66). Among the subjects included in this singular catalogue are: lyric and epic poetry, drama, theology, civil and canon law, political science, geology, grammar and orthography, cosmography, astronomy, geometry, trigonometry, arithmetic, physics, metallurgy, navigation, poliorcetics (i.e., siegecraft) and hercotectonics (the art of constructing walls and fortifications), botany, medicine, surgery, teratology (one of his earliest treatises was an account and examination of human malformations reported in Lima), sacred history, Spanish and Peruvian historiography, natural science, et cetera. He was also a renowned polyglot, writing and publishing prose and poetic works in Latin, Ancient Greek, French, Portuguese, Italian, English, and Quechua, in addition to his native Spanish. For more detailed information about Peralta’s personal, political, and intellectual career, see Sánchez.
nada intrincado en la Historia, nada refinado en la Moral, nada delicado en la Erudición y bellas Letras, nada sublime en la Eloquencia, nada sutil en la Jurisprudencia, nada impenetrable en las Mathematicas, nada inmensurable en la Arithmetica, nada armónico en la Musica, nada dilatado en la Cosmographia, nada imperceptible en la Uranographia, nada incógnito en la Geographia, nada nuevo en la Philosophia, y en fin nada dificultoso en los libros, que no aya Vmd. penetrado, y que le aya sido ingenioso. ("Carta" B1)\(^5\)

The multiple *nadas* that vainly oppose Peralta’s cognitive capacities constitute the paradoxical substance through which his brother Joseph ingeniously defines a hyperbolic *todo*—or more specifically, a *todista*, an all-encompassing subject who possesses complete knowledge of every scientific and philosophical matter. The adjectives modifying the *nadas* are carefully selected on account of their attributive pertinence: despite the vastness of the celestial sphere, nothing in cosmography is *dilatado* for him; despite the many *terrae incognitae* of Old and New Worlds, nothing in geography is *incógnito*; and so forth. The disciplines listed, of course, do correspond to the repertoire of Peralta’s publications. Tomás de Torrejón, the censor in charge of evaluating Peralta’s epic poem *Lima fundada*, complements his own report of Peralta’s manifold sapience with what could well be hinting at a real anecdote about the savant’s prestige:

> En el inmenso Mar de la Erudicion, navega á todos vientos, y todos rumbos, dando, con mas gloria que la otra celebre Nave, vna vuelta à todo el Orbe. Assi ha logrado ser vna Encyclopédia viviente, ó una animada bibliotecha, siendo tan dificil numerar todo lo que sabe, como descubrir lo que ignora; pues ni la estudiosa curiosidad ha podido con repentino assalto sorprenderle, y en qualquier punto, que desprevenido se le trata, tiene tan à mano las noticias, como si se las ministrase vna prevencion muy estudiosa, y pareciendo, que habla en el, no vn hombre, sino todas las Artes, como de Tito Ariston dixo con elegancia Plinio: *Mihi non unus homo, sed litterae ipsae, omnesque bona [sic] Artes in uno homine videntur* [To me, he does not seem a single man, but the sciences themselves, and all of the great Arts condensed in a single man]. (Aprobacion C4; translation of the Latin text is mine)

\(^5\) All of the citations from Peralta’s works come from digital versions of the *editiones principes* of his books. While these original editions often lack page numbers in their preliminary sections, these sections commonly show a capital letter every four pages that indicates the folio where the pages were printed. For my references, I use these letters as source markers; thus, for example, “Carta B2” means “the second page after the letter B appears at the bottom of the document titled “Carta.””
Torrejón begins his depiction of Peralta with two cyclical images: planetary circumnavigation (“la otra celebre Nave” appears to be the Victoria, the only ship of Fernando de Magalhães’s fleet that completed the famous journey around the globe), and a living encyclopedia (from ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία “encyclical education,” i.e., the cycle of arts and sciences). Both artfully synthesize, in their dual circularity, the two great epistemological paradigms of the European Age of Discovery —oceanic quest and erudite scrutiny— in the person of Peralta, the “animated library” who cannot be surprised, not even when purposely tested. The list of subjects Peralta masters is here substituted by a declaration of the very futility of enumerating them: “[es] tan difícil numerar todo lo que sabe, como descubrir lo que ignora.” While this trope was not uncommon, the subsequent remark, “ni la estudiosa curiosidad ha podido con repentino assalto sorprenderle,” suggests a more concrete referent, as it induces us to visualize a scenario in which intellectuals would playfully attempt to test, unsuccessfully, the limits of Peralta’s knowledge. If real (as they appear to be), these exercises would have certainly constituted an effective social mechanism to magnify and consolidate, in the local Republic of Letters, the personal mythology of the scholar who knew everything. This is, indeed, the reputation that Fermín de Irisarri attributes to Peralta in his “Aprobacion” for the Historia: “Ni causaràn admiracion los primores de esta Obra al que tuviere conocida, como ninguno ignora en estos Reynos, la Sabiduría del Autor, a quien no menos pudo hacer célebre la vasta erudición con que parece que nada ignora. . .” (A3, my emphasis). Other commendations coincide in producing laborious lists of, or allusions to, the many subjects that Peralta mastered (for example, those of the “Aprobaciones” by Irisarri and Juan de Gazitúa, included in Historia de la España vindicada, or several of the congratulatory poems included in the preliminaries of Lima fundada).

Yet along with the catalogues of subjects often appears another list: that of languages he knew. Irisarri, for example, uses a fluvial image to exalt Peralta’s proficiency in multiple tongues: “Ya se oye hablar como el Nilo, cristales, por ocho Idiomas distintos, siendo sus familiares, y que sabe con perfeccion, el Latino, el Castellano, el Frances, el Italiano, y Portugues, fuera del Griego, del Ingles, y del Indico general de este Reyno” (A4-B1). Joseph de Peralta characterizes his brother’s polyglottism as a divine gift: “Dióle [Dios] tambien à Vm. la grande facilidad para comprehender varios Idiomas, y hacerle con esto dueño de todas las Ciencias para vna general Erudicion” (“Carta,” Passion y Triumpho 4). Gazitúa succinctly approves the honorable (“plausibles”) languages Peralta masters —for him, he declares, “no ay idioma de los mas plausibles estrano” (A1). The multilingual skills of Peralta are all the more impressive in that they are the result of an autodidactic endeavor. Irisarri, for example, declares: “Lo prodigioso es,
que todas estas Ciencias, y Lenguas las supo nuestro Author sin Maestro, y el dificil idioma Frances lo supo mucho antes, que Francia frequentasse nuestros Puertos, quando ardia tanto en guerras una y otra Nacion, que aun las palabras Castellanas presentaban como enemigas batallas a las Francesas” (B1). Gazitúa identifies in Peralta both the teacher and the student: “siendose él solo en todo discipulo de su misma despierta habilidad”; Joseph, in a fraternal recollection, reminds Peralta that his linguistic erudition “la... consiguió Vm. con el continuo trabajo, y con el infatigable Estudio y exercicio en los mas sabios maestros, prophanos y Sagrados: multa labore, assidio studio, varia exercitatione, pluribus experimentis constit art dicendi [“The art of speaking is only achieved through much work, constant study, a variety of exercises, and multiple experiments,” Quintilian, _Institutio oratoria_ 2.13.15].” (“Carta,” _Passion y Triumpho_ 4; translation of the Latin text is mine).

Peralta, in sum, had achieved the reputation of the man who could discuss and write on any subject, from any perspective necessary, and in any of the eight languages he mastered. Peralta himself would actively labor to project his own repute beyond the confines of his local milieu, exchanging letters and books with intellectuals across the Atlantic. These efforts produced some important results, especially his induction into the Royal Academy of Sciences of Paris, and his correspondence with Benito Jerónimo Feijoo (whose importance for Peralta will be discussed at greater length below). Thus, by the time Peralta was composing his epic poem on Lima, he had already achieved a status that surpassed the stylistic dimension of the Baroque: in a way he had become, himself, the embodiment of such spirit. No longer a mere style or philosophy, the Baroque in Peralta was enacted as an ontological drive, a literal _modus vivendi_ rather than a _modus operandi_. As “living encyclopedia,” as Torrejón calls him, he had rhetorically managed to absorb from his peripheral condition of Limenian the knowledge amassed and cherished by the intellectuals of Europe and America (here lies, in fact, the transatlantic relevance of Torrejón’s circumnavigational imagery discussed above). The reputation of Peralta was thus articulated in terms of the highest degree of epistemological density that could be compressed in an intellectual persona —as Torrejón says in his fitting citation from Pliny the Younger quoted above, _non unus homo, sed litterae ipsae, omnesque bonae Artes in uno homine_, “not a man, but the sciences themselves and all of the great Arts in a single man.” This compact character defines the bond between Peralta’s authorial persona and his intellectual work. In fact, in hailing Peralta as the condensation of all sciences and arts, Torrejón is also anticipating the character of the poem he is approving: the epic tale of a city which, in spite of its short existence in a New World, is also capable of containing the scientific, artistic, and historical capital of the Old one.
The Archive

Published in 1732 in two volumes which comprised, in addition to its lengthy front matter, a long epic poem divided in 10 cantos in octavas reales, Lima fundada was indeed a special book in Peralta’s career. While several of the many titles he had already published (and would later publish) were related to his home city, this time Peralta was addressing the single most important event in the history of Lima: its creation. Peralta conceived a dual approach to this subject matter. The first was etiological, mythographic, and literary: it was the project of narrating, in epic intonation, the 1535 foundation of the city of Lima by retelling the story of Francisco Pizarro and his conquistadors after their arrival in the Incan Empire — a tale that included the bloody encounters between Spaniards and Incas, the subsequent internecine wars among conquistadors, the last Incan resistance, the Spaniards’ final victory, and the institution of Lima as seat of the new political order. Parallel to this diegetic program, however, was Peralta’s own foundational project: that of establishing a poetic reportage of the historical, cultural, and intellectual events that had occurred and, in the poet’s opinion, ennobled Lima in its nearly 200 years of existence, from its 1535 foundation through the time when the poem was composed, 1732. To couple these two narratives, the origin of the city and the two centuries of its history, Peralta used a Classical topos: a prophetic deliverance.

In the sixth book of his Aeneid, Virgil recounts Aeneas’s descent into the underworld and his interview with his father Anchises, a dialogue that becomes a narrative (prophetic from Aeneas’s perspective, historical from Virgil’s) of the events occurring between the mythical life of Aeneas’s son Iulus and the historical age of Augustus. For his Lima fundada, Peralta employs the same device: in the middle of the narrative a young being (as we know later, it is the spirit of Lima) attracts Pizarro to a secret forest, a locus amoenus where he reveals to the conqueror the future of the city the conquistador will found. But there is an important quantitative difference between the Aeneid and Lima fundada: while the Virgilian prophecy only takes one hundred plus verses (from 6.777 to 6.885, about 1% of the poem’s total number of lines), Peralta’s version extends from the middle of Canto 4 to the end of Canto 7, a textual mass close to 50% of the entire poem. Pizarro, the epic hero, protagonist and alleged subject of Lima fundada, is thus required to remain still for half the poem, mutely listening to an exhaustive record of the two hundred years that will follow his life. Such a lengthy deliverance allows Peralta to incorporate into the prophecy an enormous and heterogeneous amount of data that includes particulars about the geography, flora, and fauna of Lima, the life and deeds of 29 Peruvian viceroyos and the local and international events associated with their governance, numerous reports of pirate attacks, the most important natural disasters (including earthquakes, floods, and tsunamis), description
of famous miracles, details on public and religious edifices, and an extensive
catalogue of intellectual, religious, and military champions of the city; all
these poetic accounts are in turn glossed in parallel through abundant
footnotes and marginalia — so copious that they very often overwhelm the
printed page.6
In her doctoral dissertation on Lima fundada, Renée Gutiérrez
meticulously explores the implications of the multiple features of the poem
(division and nature of episodes, length of the prophecy, the profusion of
footnotes, etc.), arguing that such miscellaneous components are
constitutive of a complex process of negotiation that seeks to situate the
identity and status of the Viceroyalty of Peru, as well as to legitimate the
role of the Peruvian intelligenstia, within the body of the Spanish Monarquía.
Much can be debated about Peralta’s political agenda (and in fact, Gutiérrez
does provide a very useful survey of the competing interpretations of
Peralta’s work over the last years). But aside from the debate over the
concrete political affiliations of Peralta and their expression in the poem,
the poet’s intellectual demeanor merits in itself critical attention, particularly
regarding the key divergences the poem exhibits with respect to
conventional poetic and laudatory models. As Gutiérrez remarks, Peralta is
invested in justifying his literary and editorial choices by adjusting them to
European standards — Gutiérrez, in particular, identifies the concomitances
between Peralta’s poem and René Le Bossu’s praise of the epic genre,
Menander’s theories on encomia, and Torquato Tasso’s lengthy prophecy in
Gerusalemme liberata (this last point referred to by Peralta himself) (8-9, 27-
30). Yet parallel to these normalizing efforts are important discrepancies
with respect to epic paradigms, variants which, when contrasted with the
poet’s intellectual persona as described above, illuminate new aspects of
Peralta’s authorial complexities. Below I briefly characterize four of these
textual anomalies — together they constitute, I will subsequently argue,
eminent symptoms of a particular archival impetus:

1) A second-person biography. By way of prologue, Peralta dedicates his
poem to the Marquis of Castelfuerte, then viceroy of Peru and one of
Peralta’s most important supporters. While the prologue starts as a general
reflection on the significance of dedicating a work to a noble patron, it
quickly becomes a diligent biography of the Marquis — but narrated in the
second verbal person, to the Marquis himself! Peralta anticipates the

6 Given this wealth of information and its dominant presence in the poem, it is a
gross understatement to declare that “Lima fundada is essentially a transposition in
verse of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega’s prosaic Los comentarios reales” (51), as Mark
Thurner affirms in his otherwise excellent article on Peralta’s Historia de la España
vindicada and its rhetorical paradigms of reception.
reaction of his readership—including that of the Marquis—by suggesting that a narrative tone, rather than a mere epideictic one, would better become the characterization of his addressee: “¿Quién negará, que V.E., es mas propio Assumpto de los Cantos, que de las Ofrendas; y su gloria mas apta para luz, que para sombra; mas para inspirar con las acciones, que para defender con el respeto los elogios?” (A4). The preference of acciones over elogios sets the tone for a prologue devoted to the painstaking reconstruction of the life of its addressee, from the detailed praise of his ancestors (for whom, Peralta says, Castelfuerte appears to be the model rather than the result) through the meticulous examination of his political and military career, up to the period when the poem was composed. As a complement to this examination, Peralta uses the margins to give an orderly chronology of the years when the events described occurred. Here is a reproduction of some extracts (marginalia included) that illustrate Peralta’s way of telling the Marquis his own life:
The prologue thus transforms the mere biography of the Marquis into a tribute, compiling precise information about places, circumstances, and offices related to Castelfuerte’s life, and with all these events carefully indexed in the marginalia. In sum, a life so illustrious needs no decorative praise to validate its worth. The demonstrative value of displaying all this information, however, has a further consequence: it evinces the capacities of an omniscient narrator who not only knows the minute details of the story he is telling, but also those of his addressee’s personal story. The predominant grammatical person, furthermore, infuses the entire narrative with a forensic character, one that not only exposes, but also contrasts in its every word the knowledge of the Marquis’s life with the very person who should be the ultimate authority on that matter—the Marquis himself, addressed here as both a personal acquaintance and as Viceroy of Peru. Peralta thus becomes an arch-authority, or the author of the authority: in devising this fascinating deuterobigraphy, Peralta presents himself as a flexible archivist entitled to textualize, recount, and validate the life and deeds of the highest officer in the region.

2) A geometrical epitome. In the same prologue, Peralta explicitly equates the life and historical role of the Marquis of Castelfuerte with those of Francisco Pizarro, the protagonist of his poem. In fact, according to Peralta, the Marquis and Pizarro could hypothetically exchange places, with the Marquis as the epic hero of another age. Peralta also identifies the two of them as liminal points of the history of Spanish colonial power in the New World—a chronological equipollence he regards as “the geometry of honor”:

Excelentísimo señor: si ha sido alguna vez la acción de consagrar una Obra à un Protector excelsus, urgente deuda de su Assumpso, debe tenerse esta por la mas precisa, en que se presenta decantado un Heroe à otro Heroe, un Vencedor à Otro Triunphant, y el Primer Governador à un Virrey de este Peruano Imperio; y se une la Historia de los Ilustres, que lo han regido, à la del Famoso, que lo ha mejorado; proporcionos de obligación, las mas demonstrativas en toda la Geometria del Honor. . . Y aun, à mudarse el Teatro de los siglos, si el Decantado existiesse oy, y huviere V.E. vivido en su tiempo, debiera valerme de él, como Mecenas, para celebrar à V.E. como Heroe. (Dedicatoria A1-A2)

At first glance, this sense of geometrical correspondence between past and present seems to follow the classical conflation of Troy and Rome in Virgil’s _Aeneid_—particularly, the episode in which Aeneas is shown the souls of those who, like Augustus, will become the great Romans of the Empire. But there is a crucial difference: in the Virgilian model, Augustus’s proleptic role gestures toward the restoration of the ancient golden age that the Emperor allegedly embodied—the _Saturnia Regna_ that, Virgil insinuates in his _Eclogues_, Augustus brings back in the aftermath of the fall of the
Republic (4.5-8). Peralta’s world is, however, a New World, and as such it is bereft of ancestral utopias. The present does not restore a glorious yet lost age; the equipollence of Pizarro and the Marquis of Castelfuerte is not narrative, but valorative — a literal *equi-valencia*, for the geometry is not “de la historia,” but rather “del honor.” Peralta’s *mutatis mutandis* must not be read, then, as an idea of circular history. While projecting the foundational age onto the present time through which those origins are explored, Peralta’s present time, where the knowledge of both lives is enacted, is still the fulcrum through which the typology is validated and operative. The past is absorbed by and subordinated to the present that diagnoses the logic of identifications. Neither circular nor linear, then, the vectors that define Peralta’s chronology through the geometry of honor are perspectival: the foundational past is collapsed into the present time, a present that, while lacking the *illa tempora* of the Old World, operates as a radical epistemological horizon, with a focal point no less profound than the vertical roots of European ancestral history.

3) *A young prophet.* As opposed to the ancient, archaic prophets of the epic tradition (for example, Tiresias, Anchises, or the Sybil), whose prophetic abilities are correlative to their elderly image, the one Peralta conceives as a deliverer of the history of Lima is a young man:

_Hermoso entonces joven se le ofrece,_
_Que templando su luz à su presencia,_
_Mortal, le dice, cuyo ardor merece_
_Tantas luzes, preven tu inteligencia. . . (_4.49)_

As a complement to his own mien, the young spirit continues by referring to Lima as “La Ciudad nueva, à quien fundar meditas” (4.50), making clear that his appearance constitutes an allegory of the nascent city and its foundation as a New World event. His pubescent looks, however, are in sharp contrast with the vast amount of information he possesses, which supersedes by far that of his classical predecessors. From arts and natural sciences through the lives and deeds of all of the viceroys of Peru to an exhaustive catalogue of notable intellectual, military, and religious authorities, the divinatory proclamation of the spirit of Lima constitutes an industrious verbal reconstruction of the natural, cultural, and political history of the city, a garrulous prolepsis whose sheer dimensions eclipse those of its most prominent antecedents. The prophet’s youth, atypical in the genre, is nevertheless compensated through the radical reach of his epistemological capacities.

4) *A transatlantic speculum.* The prophetic enumeration of Limenian personalities creates a critical problem: while Peralta proclaims the names and main works of the scientific and artistic masters of the city, he is compelled to exclude his own name from that list. Such omission is
understandable. In a period for which rhetorical modesty was a critical component of the protocols of *captatio benevolentiae*, a self-inclusion could have been perceived as a lack of decorum and incurred the reader's disfavor. Besides, Peralta does hint at his own participation in a series of cultural and political events in Lima, and in the footnotes explicitly refers to his own work multiple times. Yet his name, his explicit contribution to the splendor of his city, is missing from the epic space of the actual poetic account.

There are reasons to infer that the poet was not satisfied with this self-effacement. Peralta had achieved a most prominent position in Limenian society solely because of his intellectual skills. In the logic of the prophecy, few individuals deserved to take part in the intellectual pantheon of Lima as much as him. How then, could he ignore his own laborious participation in the heroic chronicle of his city? How could he leave the archivist outside of the archives? To aggravate the omission, an extended rumor had it that the intellectual abilities of Spanish Americans — and consequently, Limenians — deteriorated after their 60th birthday. Peralta, who was 69 years old when his *Lima fundada* was published, and who evidently regarded his work as an invalidation of such opinions, not only disproves them in the footnotes, but also in the poetic text itself:

> Siempre en virtud y en genio soberano:
> Astros serán de indeficiente Espera,
> Que de su edad en el Invierno cano
> Conservarán eterna Primavera:
> Fatuo será el error, que juzgue vano
> Desvanecerse en la Estación postrera. (7.278)\(^7\)

As a fair recognition of his own work, and as rebuttal against the rumors of premature American intellectual senility, Peralta had imperative reasons to make room for himself in the poem, yet the rules of literary decorum prevented him from doing so. To navigate this predicament, Peralta devises an elaborate strategy: in the middle of the catalogue of illustrious Americans and Spaniards related to the New World, he suddenly includes, in a most privileged place, an account of the life and works of a Spaniard who did not live in New World: the Benedictine friar Benito Jerónimo Feijoo. In what constitutes the longest footnote of the poem — one that runs throughout four pages, and whose content is continued by another long footnote — Peralta initially refers to Feijoo as a first-class authority who effectively refuted the rumors of premature senility in the Americas and thus defended the intellectual class of the New World —

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\(^7\) See also footnote 232, commenting on this stanza.
something which, indeed, Feijoo does in his *Theatro crítico universal*. Parallel to the footnote, the actual poem praises Feijoo as a “Nuevo Heròe” who “otro Canto merece” (7.280). Yet this unexpected inclusion of Feijoo in the catalogue of great Limenians, first justified by his role in refuting the imputation of American intellectual decay associated with aging, subtly becomes a full panegyric of the Benedictine:

De este error los vindica [a los Ingenios de los Españoles de las Americas] el M.R.P. M. Fr. Benito Feijoo . . . en el quarto tomo de su Theatro Critico; para cuyo elogio (aun quando lograsse lo que arriba he dicho, esto es, aprender de su Eloquencia para él mismo) hallaria compitiendose el Author con su misma Obra; siendo esta tan grande, que à su produccion solo podra excederla con su fecundidad. Es esta la Fuente de aquella, pero Fuente de Pielago, que es a vn mismo tiempo manantial, y Oceano. Assi manifiesta, que lo es de todo lo que ay capaz de humana Ciencia: pues si no se inventa alguna nueva, quisiera yo saber, qual era la que ignoraba. (7.278, n. 232).

Peralta then continues his commendation by listing some of the disciplines Feijoo masters: ancient and modern philosophy, mathematics, music, medicine, chemistry, anatomy, botany, ethics, politics, rhetoric, history, and the various types of theology—scholastic, dogmatic, and moral.

At this point, a parallel is manifest. Peralta could in all fairness characterize his colleague Feijoo as an epistemological prodigy, and justify the extensive treatment of a non-Limenian as a gesture of deference for a major intellectual who defended the New World and with whom he sustained personal contact, exchanging books, correspondence, and praise. Indeed, the spirit of Lima grants Feijoo a virtual honorary citizenship in the city that Pizarro will found: “Este de tu ciudad ya es excelente / Muestra de quanto prospera producet” (4.286). Yet Peralta’s description of Feijoo gestures toward a further intention. In the academic milieu that had so consecrated his erudition and polyglotism, Peralta knew well that his readers would not miss the parallel between Feijoo and himself, especially when the praise of the Benedictine contains the cataloguing tropes commonly assigned to him (and which would appear in the prefatory approvals of *Lima fundada*). Peralta spares no epithets to ensure this connection: “Fuente de Pielago,” “la luz es, como su Entendimiento proferido,” etc. (7.278, n. 232). Even his diction becomes ambivalent, as when he affirms that “para [el] elogio [de Feijoo] . . . hallaria compitiendose el Author con su misma Obra,” which could mean that, for the praise of

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8 Peralta’s pride in his personal acquaintance with Feijoo is manifest. To see the terms of the conversation between these two intellectuals, see Williams, “Peralta and Feijoo: Two Letters.”
Feijoo, the Benedictine would need to compete with his own intellectual opus or that Peralta—the “Author” of the poem—could also rival Feijoo’s works. Through a display of similar attributes, by tacitly foregrounding the existence of two equally powerful epistemological agents who mirror each other across the ocean, Peralta skillfully manages to occupy his rightful place in the catalogue of his own poem, and defines the potential of a transatlantic equivalence between the intellectual classes of the Old and New World—embodied in Feijoo and himself.

A second-person biography codified through a perspectival geometry projected onto the present time; a young prophet whose extreme eloquence exceeds his own appearance; the commendation, in a local catalogue, of a non-Limenian erudite whose attributes nevertheless correspond to those of Peralta: these are, among several others, the peculiar mechanisms through which the surplus of Peralta’s knowledge is manifest in the poem. It now remains to interrogate their relevance in relation to our initial inquiry about the New World archive. I will examine this final dimension by looking at the differences between a well-known theorization of the archive, that of Jacques Derrida, and the epistemological impetus that Peralta exemplifies.

The Elasticity of the Archive

In Archive Fever, Jacques Derrida recalls that the very word archive is already (as any word) a storing mechanism whose affinities with the Greek words arkhon, arkheion, and arkhε bear witness to the legacy of a crucial bond: the relationship between recording and law. More specifically, as Derrida points out, the history of the word evinces the locative character of the interdependence between storing and judging: “[T]he meaning of ‘archive,’ its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek arkheion: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the

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9 I select the Derridean notion of archive for its contrapuntal relevance with respect to Peralta’s project, but, as the reader is aware, such model is by no means the only one available. One logical choice to discuss notions of archive in Latin America is of course the classic study by Roberto González Echevarría, Myth and Archive (1990), which envisions the archive as a discursive modus operandi of Latin American prose—one that absorbs and reproduces rhetorical paradigms (juridical, naturalistic, and anthropological) in its own diction. Also important are Antony Higgins’s Constructing the Criollo Archive (2000), which evaluates the fluctuations of the criollo consciousness in two theoretical treatises of the 18th-century; and Kathryn Burns’ Into the Archive (2010), which scrutinizes 16th and 17th-century legal documentation issued in Cuzco in order to foreground the crucial role of notaries and notarial procedures in the power dynamics of the period.
archons, those who commanded” (2). As a locus where the archival occurs, the arkheion is both the place where law is kept and whence it emanates. As primal point of departure, what the word archive stores is first and foremost its appetite for its own arkhe, that is, its very notion of principle — sequential, juridical, or both. Derrida, however, articulates his approach to this arkhe by means of a philosophical contravention:

Let us not begin at the beginning, nor even at the archive.

But rather at the word “archive” — and with the archive of so familiar a word. Arkhe, we recall, names at once the commencement and the commandment. This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, there where things commence—physical, historical, or ontological principle—but also the principle according to the law, there where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given—nomological principle. (1)

“Let us not begin at the beginning” is, evidently, a playful dismissal of the maxim consecrated by Aristotle in his Poetics: λέγω µεν ἄρξάµεν θαυµάζων κατὰ φύσιν πρῶτον ἀπὸ τῶν πρῶτων (“Let us begin, in accordance with nature, first from the first things”; 1447a). By challenging the axiom of a primal founding archivist of Western philosophy, Derrida seeks to stress the discursive (more specifically, grammatical) character of the coordination among the different modulations of the arkhe — hence the adverb “apparently.” Yet the principle is there: even as a pretension, ideological residuum, or mirage, the Derridean notion of archive conjures in itself, in its own verbal history, the etiological attributes that invest the archival record with juridical authority and historical substance.

Here, by way of differential, lies the possibility of addressing the archive of the New World, since the coordination with which Derrida begins to diagnose the aporias of the archive, or even the pretense of such coordination (once again, “apparently”), is by definition impossible in the colonial history of the Americas — by virtue of the fact that the locus of the law, that “there where men and gods command,” is just too far away. For it is not only an ocean that separates the Americas from the (royal) house where the nomological principle is stored. Far vaster than the oceanic distance is the chronological divide that renders the Old World and the New World antinomies — i.e., “against the law.” In the logic of the archive, of the archaic arkhe that regulates the beginning and the law — as Derrida has it, those “two orders of order: sequential and jussive”—, the newness of the New World is dysfunctional. And this is so for two reasons. Firstly, because the origin of America is, as a New World event, an origin at hand, and possesses none of ancestral properties of the arkheion’s commencements. Secondly, because such origin appears, as the fragile vessels that
participated in its invention, lost in the mirages projected by its competing narratives—that is, America’s multiple tales of discovery and conquest, competing names, fraudulent documentations, and ever-shifting place in the Biblical history of the World. And if these two aspects disable the sequential principle of the \textit{arkhe} in the New World, the colonial status of America, in turn, negates the possibility (and, one could argue, even the desire) of housing the jussive or nomological principle, whose ultimate seat is the throne of the King of Spain. Literally, conceptually, and legally far from an \textit{arkhe}, the colonial archive of the New World presents itself in the shape of what we might call a \textit{telarchy}, a place and time distant from its system’s jussive and primal source of agency, serving the latter only as a remote transmitter. The archival coordination among knowledge, oldness, and authority is thus dismantled: America’s colonial structure is grounded on the basis of an external authority that determines what can be known, what kind of knowledge is authoritative and authorized, and who the authors are for whom knowledge is permitted. In other words, the New World does not own the rules of its own epistemological coordination—which is, incidentally, what also defines the notion of archive in a Foucauldian sense. Within Derridean theoretical coordinates, the archive of the American archive is still across the ocean. Yet, as Peralta’s work reveals, the New World is not bereft of its own archival impetus.

This appears to be the key theoretical importance of an intellectual such as Peralta in our understanding of colonial forms of knowledge, for his simultaneous embodiment (as “living encyclopedia”) and enactment (as a poet) of the archive provides a different version of the voracious anxieties, unsettling contradictions, and intense negotiations of what Derrida deems “archival fever.” Mabel Moraña, in her classic essay “Barroco y conciencia criolla en Hispanoamérica” (1988), examined the appropriation and local “contamination” of metropolitan discourses by American authors as a means to problematize the very discourses they were allegedly imitating. Peralta provides an exacerbation of such mechanics through an uncanny display of information. Instead of the illusive coordination of law and knowledge, as Derrida has it, Peralta advances an epistemological affirmation whose command of all the arts and sciences, precisely because they are colonial, suggests an implicit and ironic detachment of law from knowledge. The epistemological event that Peralta embodies is therefore neither fully conditioned by nor independent from the colonial logic: it occurs both within it and in spite of it. Such detachment between \textit{nomos} and \textit{episteme} is not simply political, but also ontological: knowledge exists \textit{apart from} the law, independently from its enactment or codification, which also means that the sequential dimension of \textit{arkhe} is not tied to the jussive character of \textit{arkhe}. Whether this phenomenalization of colonial knowledge, or the opening of the American archive, constitutes in itself an indictment against the extrinsic law that dwells in an \textit{arkheion} across the sea and cancels
the metropolitan archontic principle of the archive, or rather an affirmation of it, is a debate that I prefer not to consider at this point. What is certain, however, is that Peralta’s performance of knowledge is self-affirmative in a very basic sense. It operates, in a way, as a clarifying statement, one that asserts that archival knowledge can indeed be produced in and from the New World.

The four textual anomalies of Lima fundada described above function, in this sense, as behavioral gestures of this archive. Schematically, they could be categorized as absorbent and expansive. The idea of a second-person biography and the parallel between Pizarro and the Marquis would be examples of absorption: through these tropes, Peralta conflates both epideictic and narrative strategies, and past and present, within the cultural horizon that he himself embodies. In this way, Peralta presents himself as the assimilative force in which the poem, the story, the hero, and the reader all collapse, a process of compression that infuses the archivist with an extreme epistemological density. This, indeed, is the actual archival value of Peralta as living and compact sum of the knowledge of both Old and New World. The youthful appearance of the Spirit of Lima, accordingly, is not only an image of the short existence of the city, but also the temporal...

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10 Such a debate, nevertheless, is one that merits much critical examination. Gutiérrez discusses at length the multiple interpretations of Peralta’s political standpoint, fluctuating between his characterization as a protonationalist to his being deemed a radical royalist, and she herself proposes a more transitional way to read the colonial politics of our author (34-47). Mazzotti, in turn, considers the role of Amerindian elements in what he calls the “poética de la nación”—a self-defining anxiety that Peralta the poet shared with two poets contemporary with him, Rodrigo de Valdés and Luis Antonio de Oviedo. Finally, while devoted to another colonial savant, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, Anna More’s recent book Baroque Sovereignty also constitutes a very important contribution to the debate, as she endeavors to demonstrate the functionality of the Creole notion of patria within the Spanish monarchy, as well as to consider the limits of the concepts of subjectivity, identity, and consciousness during the colonial Baroque.

11 As it appears, the same spirit animated the archival endeavors of Mexican Jesuit Francisco Javier Clavijero, author of Historia antigua de México (1780-81), the second case analyzed by David Slade in his piece “Imagining from Within: Archives, History, and Ibero-American Enlightenment Discourse.” Following the methodology of Sigüenza, Clavijero resorts to his expertise in Nahuatl and his familiarity with the indigenous Mexican pictographic tradition in order to define his archival and philological authority over the history of his patria. Based on these forms of knowledge, Slade argues, Clavijero articulated an alternative archive that competed with other forms of epistemological authority which, nourished by the Enlightenment and crystallized in institutions such as the Archivo General de Indias, were also circulating in Europe and America during the 18th century.
The metaphor of a “brief” individual who, nevertheless, is capable of containing and relating huge quantities of data.

The extensive deliverance of the Spirit’s prophecy, and Peralta’s self-characterization through the representation of someone else (the role of Feijoo in the poem), would in turn constitute expansive occurrences. In a big-bang-like manner, the extreme epistemological density contained in the intellectual persona of Peralta suddenly projects, with astonishing intensity, waves of knowledge that both elongate the historical significance of the short-lived city of Lima and, traversing the Atlantic, resonate with the most eminent intellectual authorities of the Old World. The brief archive of the Americas turns out to be infinitesimal: Lima, in its brevity, hosts a far larger load of characters, events, and symbols than it would appear to contain. The detailed account contained in the biography of the Marquis, the exhaustive catalogue of Limenian personalities, the specular figuration of Feijoo, and the copious footnote system that complements all this data are the performative manifestations of such archival expansion.

Taken together, the images of absorption, compression, and expansion justify characterizing Peralta’s archival impetus as elastic. By elasticity I allude to the “stretching” or amplification of the capacity of containment attributed to an allegedly small archive. As said at the beginning, the American archive implied a dilemma directly linked to its newness. Peralta has to work out his idea of archive with the precondition of an archive that has been institutionalized as new, and whose contents are therefore supposed to be scarce. His response is the vertiginous exploration of the natural and political history of his city, to such a degree that the young Lima becomes a vantage point that reveals a sociopolitical reality as complex and voluminous as the ones that had been recorded through the millennial textual practices of the Old World. Lima and its archivist are thus poetically enlarged, their newness implying not a paucity of history, arts, and sciences, but a condensed form of those values. On account of its elasticity, a single archivist and a single city are capable of overcoming their alleged brevity and stretching themselves to an astonishing degree, one which, by dint of synecdoche, points to an even larger and more complex reality: that of the New World.

“Elastic,” in this sense, is not only meaningful on account of the dynamics of contraction and dilatation described. As the Greek etymon ἐλαστικός—a participial form of ἐλαύνω, “to drive, conduct, impulse”—suggests, “elastic” as “driving” is also a way to insinuate the zestful, energetic, impetuous character of Peralta’s intellectual performance. His incessant displacement from one discipline and genre to another, manifest in his bibliography in general and in Lima fundada in particular, reveals an epistemological voracity whose impetus truly defines the rhetorical value of the American archive. Knowledge is enacted (or deployed) through a
quantitative drive: the sheer amassing of knowledge about the foundation of Lima and its verbose rendering are concomitant procedures invested in the formation of a colonial image of the metropolis, one to be contrasted with the metropolitan images of the colonies, as a mirror of a mirror. Elasticity, therefore, is in Peralta’s work the particular inflection through which the archival fever or *malade* characterized by Derrida operates. Peralta actively sought to master as many disciplines and arts as he could, because in doing so he found the tacit yet irresistible opportunity to reconstruct a hierarchy where the epistemic principle that he aspired to embody —once again, as a “living Encyclopedia or animated library”— could subvert its nomological counterpoint. In a geopolitical reality where the metropolis was located across the Atlantic and its directives were projected onto the New World as an epiphenomenon of the imperial and transoceanic irradiation of the Spanish crown (this is what would justify the inscription *plus ultra* on the coat of arms of Charles V), Peralta’s archival drive is truly meaningful as a transatlantic phenomenon. It is not a minor irony that the transatlantic and vertiginous archive that he embodied would end up, centuries later, earning him the nickname of *doctor Océano*.

I would like to conclude these considerations by taking a bolder step and suggesting that the elasticity of Peralta’s work constitutes, in the literary history of the New World, a trend rather than an exception. Certainly, the encyclopedic appetite and its multifarious performance as an elastic archive is also present in many of Peralta’s intellectual contemporaries, such as Juan Espinosa Medrano “El Lunarejo,” Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Juan del Valle Caviedes, José Bermúdez de la Torre, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, and others. I am inclined to think, however, that the epistemological drive originated by the ideologeme of New World is not exhausted in the 17th-century Baroque or the 18th-century Neoclassicism (for which, by the way, Peralta worked as a hinge figure). Something of this appetite persevered in the encyclopedic figures of the 19th century —I am thinking in particular of Andrés Bello, José Joaquín de Olmedo, Simón Rodríguez, and even Simón Bolívar. Perhaps it can also be traced through much of the narrative production of the 20th century —for example, in the self-sufficient ontologies of García Márquez’s *Cien años de soledad*, in the dreams of a *novela total* enthusiastically expounded by the young Mario Vargas Llosa, in the ironic catalogues of poets and world tours of Roberto Bolaño’s *Los detectives salvajes*, and, of course, in the encyclopedic images that fill the narratives of Jorge Luis Borges— whose famous *aleph* serves here as a rather precise epigraph. The confirmation of this impression would demand, of course, a much vaster investigation.
WORKS CITED


