

SAUGATA BHADURI (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi):

Representations of Spain in Early Modern English Drama: A Study in Polycolonial Angst

Though an English expedition sanctioned by Henry VII is reported to have reached Newfoundland and parts of East Asia as early as 1497, it was only in 1577 that England had its first formal colony on Baffin Island, to be followed by settlements in the Americas throughout the 1580s and 90s, the establishment of the East India Company in 1600, and intense colonial activities in the Caribbean in the first decade of the 17th century. It is interesting to note that the Anglo-Spanish War (1585-1604) broke out exactly during these years, leading to a spurt of representation of Spain in the drama of the period. While the War as well as the concomitant depiction of Spain in these twenty years are often credited to intra-European and even internecine Catholic-Protestant conflicts, my argument in this paper, on the basis of a reading of representative plays of the period, is that it could be more rightfully traced to what I call a 'polycolonial angst', or the mutual anxiety of multiple European powers – inclusive of the Dutch, the Danish and the French too, but primarily involving the English and the Spanish (Portugal was a part of the Spanish empire between 1580 and 1680) – in their bid to carve the colonial pie amongst themselves.