Writing the New World

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Narratives of Conquest and the Conquest of Narrative

These works do not describe events; they are events, and they transcend self-reference to refer to the world outside themselves.

Rolena Adorno, *The Polemics of Possession*¹

The central claim of this book is that Spanish natural historians of the sixteenth century created a new genre of inquiry in their representations of the New World’s natural environments. In the process, they deployed a wide range of recurring narrative tropes found across modern political thought: premodern states of nature, progressive strategies for resource “improvement,” and romantic epics dramatizing the plight of human life against environmental insecurity.² Central to this collective endeavor was the image of the New World as an untamed landscape that could serve the dual ends of imperial extraction: resource accumulation and knowledge appropriation.³

Yet what emerged from the efforts of these early explorers was the blurry portrait of a future world from which Europeans could assess their failings. For both Spaniards and their Creole successors, natural history served as a medium through which lived-experience, natural philosophy, and visual culture could inform a burgeoning narrative of civilization.⁴ This chapter focuses on how that vision came about, specifically the distinct elements from Spain’s *Reconquista* that constitute a master narrative from which sixteenth-century missionaries could craft a historiography of New World nature.⁵

In the long sixteenth century, natural history was but one of the narratives shaping the emergence of European modernity and the Scientific Revolution.⁶ Alongside merchant capitalism and the centralization of juridical power, natural historians competed with other ideological trends to render their craft politically useful. They also had the added goal to line up their efforts with the
aims of “the Queen of the sciences”—theology. Key to the development of this missionary science was natural history’s concerns with genealogy (particularly in the absence of biblical or classical points of reference), comparative analysis (as an extension of exegetical interpretation), experimentation (as a feature of cultural extirpation), and practical philosophy (as a key disposition of their humanist training). Spanish naturalists were situated between state demands for survey data, on the one hand, and the experience of wonder eagerly sought by Europeans, on the other.

As I argue below, however, natural history evolved in this context along different narrative axes and disputes over the proper bases of empirical evidence. Closer examination of these differences shows not only the evolving conceptual formation of natural history, but more importantly its cohesion as a genre of political thought. In the first part of this chapter, I discuss the narrative origins of Spanish descriptions of American nature and why narrative is the appropriate conceptual starting point for the intellectual reconstruction of sixteenth-century New World nature. Second, I examine the narrative styles employed by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, Bartolomé de Las Casas, Bernardino de Sahagún, Francisco Hernández, and José de Acosta in order to develop a typology of constitutive narratives in and about New World nature. Throughout the chapter, I note how the evolution of early modern natural history as a science of domination is inextricable from Spain’s grand narrative of imperial ascendance, illustrating the distinct blend of exegetical analysis and empirical observation characterizing its practice.

At the background level, the encounter, conquest, and naturalization of a Spanish imperial project was preceded by a series of epistemic shifts in the political imaginary of the European continent. Central across these shifts was the narrative of *La Reconquista*: a 700-year military and cultural campaign against the Moorish Caliphates of Southern Iberia that culminated in the joint reign of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile as Reyes Católicos. As Patricia Seed has shown, *La Reconquista* served the dual function of priming narrative accounts in the New World to justify the creation of an empire, while also legitimating the violence employed in its conquest. I go further here by showing how *La Reconquista* set up what I call distinct “constitutive narratives” across the long sixteenth century; that is to say, moral frames of reference that would guide the efforts of missionary naturalists as they moved from the conquest of nature to its colonial domestication.

By unpacking the respective tropes, sources of evidence, and alleged normative implications that Spanish naturalists saw emerging from their interaction with indigenous societies and nature, I also show that key to the aims
of their natural histories was to ground the political narrative of empire in the proper spiritual and philosophical terrain. Rather than merely extending the epic chronicles of religious conquest and manly virtue that characterized the Spanish Reconquista, natural history gave rise to a more complex master narrative, with parallel modes of scholarly inquiry to legitimize its goals.

I want to be careful at the outset to present a portrait of the multiple natural environments and beings depicted by natural historians that does not treat the Americas as an undifferentiated canvas. Indeed, this is one of the primary issues with how canonical political theorists from John Locke to Adam Smith tended to conceptualize precontact life in the New World. While the range of landscapes, animals, weather patterns, and rituals examined by the natural histories I interpret is limitless, my focus is on how distinct audiences were engaged.

Particularly in the cases of Oviedo and Las Casas, rhetorical description itself was “the event” to admire, not only the contents of their observations. To that end, I spend more time looking at specific depictions of New World nature in Sahagún’s, Hernández’s, and Acosta’s works than in Oviedo’s and Las Casas’s. This is by no means a rejection of the contents they each described, but rather a tactical choice to emphasize their form and its lasting effects. At stake in clarifying these different subgenres are the connective tissues between a narrative of conquest inherited from Spain’s rise to imperial prominence and the attempts by naturalists to shape their own narrative of empire throughout the early decades of colonization.

The Narrative Origins of American Nature

The concept of nature is not a new concern for political theorists. Yet naturalistic experience of the New World—not to mention its documentation—remains an ambivalent theme within the study of early modern thought. There are two prevailing views on the relationship between lived-experiences and their narrative representation, whether in textual or visual form. On one side, theorists and philosophers of narrative from Hayden White to Paul Ricoeur argue that all attempts at reconstruction or contextual clarification of concepts are culturally bound. More specifically, as Hayden White writes, “It is precisely because the narrative mode of representation is so natural to human consciousness, so much an aspect of everyday speech and ordinary discourse, that its use in any field of study aspiring to the status of a science must be suspect.” In applying discursive frames to the past, we inevitably impose upon it our own assump-
tions and stories about the world. Another camp of theorists and philosophers of language, from Martin Heidegger to David Carr, see the role of stories in more structural terms, as features of human consciousness.12 As Mark Thurner puts it, precisely about the colonial past, “historical knowledge works very much like a mythology: it is always written and read from and for a posterity that is ‘us’ ‘and ours’ . . . from a future that already is or was . . . the writing of history is always about what has been and is, but also about what should or will be.”13 For this camp of theorists, the history of the world itself would be impossible without our ability to tell stories.

The tension between experience and representation is perhaps all the more salient when it concerns accounts of nature. As William Cronon has shown, at the heart of nature-centric narratives lies a negotiation of human values. The kinds of stories humans have told and continue to tell about the natural world, he argues, show that “what we care the most about nature is its meaning for human beings. . . . Human interests and conflicts create values in nature that in turn provide the moral center of our stories.”14 In the sixteenth century, this moral center was constantly in flux, as the struggle over telling nature’s history was mirrored by the imperial struggle over nature itself. That control was first sought out as part of a moralizing mission grounded in stories, myths, and allegories, where colonial domination accompanied a renewed search for knowledge and millenarian convictions of salvation. To make military conquest endure, a spiritual conquest was necessary to provide meaning out of such otherworldly transformations.

For my purposes, linking the concept of narrative to the shifting moral centers of the sixteenth century conveys the innovative ways that Spanish chroniclers, explorers, and missionaries wrote about the New World. Following Leslie Paul Thiele’s description, narratives “serve as the banisters of ethical life,” where attempts to ground experience via “metaphor and mythology play a greater role than axioms and argument in the development of moral character.”15 The natural histories composed by Spanish missionaries and explorers sought to provide such a banister in a still-unknown New World. As I elaborate below, the implications of their contributions to history, science, and political ideology have been mostly overlooked, I suspect, as a result of their ties to religious ideals; yet their revival sheds light on many historical, even contemporary, challenges worth re-examining from our posterity.

Though Imperial Spain claimed possession over the largest known territorial expanse of its time, the culture of state secrecy that shaped its scientific endeavors remains an obstacle for historical interpretation.16 Although knowl-
edge accumulation was encouraged, knowledge dissemination proved far more politically risky. Yet there are broader institutional dynamics to account for as well. As John H. Elliot has documented, one of the most influential myths of our age of sovereign states is to overplay the extent to which territorial unity is the *de jure* governing principle of modernity. Instead, Elliot points to the history of “composite states” across the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as an alternative, and at the time desirable, path of political aggrandizement. In this composite model, units with a strong administrative core, “[coexisted] with a myriad smaller territorial and jurisdictional units jealously guarding their independent status.”

Hence the model of national histories is not only inadequate to study the cultures informing scientific exploration in the Americas, it can be downright misleading.

Given the composite status of the Spanish Empire—which included not only the imperial metropolis and viceroyalties in the New World, but also multiethnic territories across the Netherlands and Germany, alongside a wide array of corporate entities from missionary orders to commercial clearing houses—the links between its symbolic power and influence over its agents are far from straightforward. That diffusion of power is what allowed, on the one hand, for jurists and philosophers to actively debate imperial policy toward indigenous peoples in Spain, but also generated, on the other hand, the culture of bureaucratic rivalry that pit colonial municipalities, merchants, and missionary orders against each other for jurisdiction over indigenous labor and well-being. This partly explains the absence of conventional—or, in their case, Scholastic—Spanish political theorists, such as Luis de Molina or Juan de Miranda, among others, in my analysis. While some of these thinkers wrote treatises in urban capitals, others braved the elements to tell of the unknown and build altogether new analytic vocabularies. In sum, the “empire” was shaped by groups and individuals on the so-called geographical margins just as much as by the learned men in the courts.

Moreover, as historians of science have increasingly documented, the Spanish encounter with the lands, peoples, and creatures of the New World played a decisive role in the emergence of a modern, scientific worldview across Europe. The distinct environments of the Americas fueled a vital concern with perennial questions regarding the state, the boundaries of legality, national identity, and civilization, in addition to inquiries into the ecological origins of these landscapes. If nature was the catalyst, natural history was the means to arrive at a whole set of new questions. As Shawn Miller notes in his *An Environmental History of Latin America*, one such set of new concerns was rethinking what writing history was all about:
History without nature is not only self-serving, it is inaccurate, short-sighted, and potentially perilous to the human story line. For the drama to be complete, we must cast both nature and culture in the roles of protagonist, for each have dealt the other health and sickness, aid and harm, and life and death . . . All of our histories need not be environmental, but in some of our histories, nature and culture deserve equal billing.22

Thus beyond the potential material benefits of seemingly boundless natural resources, the spirit of conquest was paralleled by a spirit of inquiry. Just as Charles V had sought to rebrand the Spanish nation under the Romanesque mantra of Plus Ultra, so too did natural historians aspire to become a “Pliny” of the New World.23 Yet despite its prominent role in making the New World first known and familiar to European audiences, Imperial Spain and its various agents have since the sixteenth century retained a distinct notoriety.

As rival empires emerged in the seventeenth century, the violence and greed that characterized the early conquest of the Americas was used to denounce and diminish Spanish authority. Spain was increasingly deemed a backward, corruptive, and abusive power. Much of that negative image was especially fueled by the pen of the empire’s own missionaries, most notably Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1566). In his Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias, published in 1552, Las Casas notes with unparalleled candor, if not hyperbole, the extent of Spanish atrocities.24 Indeed, as the work was translated into multiple languages, it was adapted for other kinds of anti-Spanish endeavors. Not ironically, the first translation appeared in Antwerp in 1578, just two years after the city had been sacked by Spanish soldiers in a massacre known as the Spanish Fury. Translated by the Flemish author Jacques de Miggrode, the preface explains how Las Casas’s testimony should “serve as example and warning to the seventeen provinces of the Low Countries” of the extent to which Spaniards would go to subjugate a free people.25

Deemed as incapable of civilized rule, and ill-suited to be the intellectual center in a shifting geopolitical landscape, Imperial Spain’s reputation was threatened long before its administrative or territorial control of the New World was challenged. Yet the historical arc of Spain’s triumph and decline is doubly instructive. As Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra has documented, North European thinkers from Francis Bacon to Alexander von Humboldt relied heavily on the empirical repository collected by agents of Imperial Spain.26 The difference in how these two thinkers appropriated Spanish findings, however, is contextually important, for as Cañizares-Esguerra notes, “Increasing Dutch and English competition and the failure of Spain and Portugal to carry out
reforms to consolidate the centralizing power of the state as in France led to
the relative ‘decline’ of the Iberians in the seventeenth century. Already dur-
ing the Reformation and wars of Dutch independence,” he goes on to illus-
trate, “northwestern European printers had created an image of the Iberians as
superstitious and rapacious plunderers. ‘Decline’ not only hardened percep-
tions; criticism now came wrapped in the idioms of progress and the Iberians
were cast as essentially non-Europeans: backward and ignorant.”27 Critiques of
Spanish intellectual indolence were thus linked to a broader narrative deployed
in defense of threatened Protestant interests and with the intent of curbing
Catholic Spain’s ideological power.

While scholars of global history such as Brian Owensby and Bianca Premo
have recently made inroads to account for Imperial Spain’s early political con-
tributions to modernity—without sugarcoating the complex architecture of
domination it maintained—much of that literature concentrates on the legal
and institutional formation of the empire vis-à-vis its European competitors.28
The empirical origins of that political infrastructure, to say nothing of how
religious orders were at its intellectual center, are also a key part of the evolving
scholarly discourses on the history of the Enlightenment.29 As Spanish natural-
ists made sense of the New World’s environmental riches, they blazed a trail
that others would soon follow.

Writing the Natural History of the New World

News of Columbus’s arrival in the Americas brought elaborate, fantastic de-
scriptions of new lands and peoples. Many of the first chroniclers of American
nature also spawned outrageous tales of monstrous creatures and uninhab-
itable landscapes.30 As these images became widespread throughout Europe,
growing numbers of humanists, scientists, theologians, jurists, and learned
scholars were in the midst of returning to the writings of Greco-Roman think-
ers, and in turn began searching for interpretive links between the so-called
Old and New Worlds. According to Antonio Barrera-Osorio, the confluence of
commercial and scholarly pursuits of the time incited great artistic and techno-
logical innovation, as “scientific practitioners began to leave aside traditional
textual-medieval practices and to search for empirical methods of understand-
ing nature.”31 A growing sense of boldness and investigation informed writings
from this period, challenging in great numbers the authority of the Ancients
on the laws and secrets of nature.32

For political theorists, as well as historians of Imperial Spain, the work of
Anthony Pagden has been foundational in translating the many intellectual
and political changes that Spanish exploration brought forth to early modern thought. His now-classic text, *The Fall of Natural Man*, documents the debates over natural slavery and economic development that shaped colonial legislation, from the *Leyes de Burgos* of 1512 to the *Leyes Nuevas* of 1542. These bodies of law dictated the proper behavior of imperial agents in light of the conquest’s worst excesses. As Pagden argues, the emergence of these laws would have been impossible without the observations of visionaries such as Las Casas, whose experience in the Americas challenged Aristotelian notions of natural slavery and the alleged incapacity of Amerindian peoples for mental and social development. However, although Pagden is interested in recovering a philosophical attitude about the New World and its inhabitants, he is less attuned to how the natural environment of the Americas itself plays a formative role in the legal, social, and political discourses shaping imperial actions.

In their efforts to craft natural history as a coherent field of study, New World naturalists negotiated two ideological imperatives: on one hand, they served the material and political interests of Spanish imperial administration; on the other, natural historians saw their craft as part of a distinctively scientific worldview. According to María Portuondo, “Nowhere was the determination to create a new framework to explain the reality of the New World more steadfast than in sixteenth century Spain.” However, she goes on to warn:

Practices that from our modern perspective might seem scientific and that we associate with post-Newtonian methodologies either did not exist during the early modern era or belong to wholly different approaches to explaining nature. Therefore, when early modern historians refer to *science* we are using the word anachronistically but also as an expedient way of referring to a group of quite distinct ways of producing knowledge about the natural world.

Storytelling in this context helped naturalize the imperial mission by taking the American landscape and its contents as the unit of analysis to explain social, political, and economic differences between indigenous peoples and Europeans. The natural world was thus not the setting, but the means through which modern empire itself was first formalized. And while histories of Imperial Spain often begin with the dual legacies of state- and empire-formation, both are the result of two narrative tropes: an existential struggle with allegedly uncivilized others and the legitimation of wartime exploits through chivalric myths of manly virtue.

Chivalric epics became a central medium through which the battles, ballads, and romances were popularized—first in the *Reconquista*, then in the New
World’s conquest. A veritable Siglo de Oro was inaugurated with the encounter and colonization of the Americas, as Spain’s alleged cultural, religious, and historical superiority—first forged in just warfare against the Moors—was further bolstered by the formalization of the Castilian dialect. Soldiers, jurists, and missionaries alike portrayed their struggles and stories in the vernacular of a so-called Spanish tongue. More than just offering stylized accounts of military prowess, however, the chivalric epic shaped a narrative style that emphasized both lived-experiences and providential cultural goals. Epic heroes told their stories as appeals to action, shaping cadres of sailors, soldiers, and men of faith to follow the bidding of both King and Church. Natural historians were no different in this regard. More critically, their writings sought to blend the aims of military and spiritual conquest toward the subjugation of nature itself.

Natural History as Narrative of Conquest

Three different constitutive narratives about New World nature can be traced in the writings of sixteenth-century natural historians: first, the monstrous and paradisiacal narratives of Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo (1478–1557) and Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1566); second, the ethnographic and anthropological theories of Bernardino de Sahagún (1499–1590); and third, the experimental models of data collection and practical philosophy developed by Francisco Hernández (1514–1587) and José de Acosta (1539–1600). Taken separately, these three frames focus on a respective political premise: for Oviedo and Las Casas, different ethical models of nature-society interaction debated by imperial authorities; for Sahagún, the value of intercultural knowledge for the management of colonial institutions; and for Hernández and Acosta, the central role of practical philosophy as a scientific strategy of domination.

Table 1 below lists the different narrative types employed by Spanish missionary naturalists and their respective works of natural history. In addition to tropes and evidentiary sources, I include the “Constitutive Narratives” that gave rise to distinct stylistic elements, as well as the “Narrative Effects” that would emerge from hypothesized interactions between future colonial societies and the natural world. Rather than offering a continuation of the epic narrative of religious conquest and manly virtue, natural history gave rise to a more complex, integrative, and experimental mode of scientific inquiry and political storytelling: a naturalist epic.

Each of the above literary tropes employed by Spanish natural historians—for example, nature as a timeless space, as a bifurcated realm of good and evil, or as a Great Book to learn from—represents a different style of empirical
inquiry, a set of theoretical presuppositions, and a range of political effects, which I explore in more detail in the following sections. Importantly, the normative dimensions of these inquiries were negotiated through the search for coherent, baseline evidence of the connections between American nature and Amerindian societies. Taken together, these three phases in the evolution of sixteenth-century natural history reveal the layered efforts to formalize the experience of nature: first in the name of cultural conquest and later as a self-conscious science. Though the Reconquista was not the only narrative at work in early modern Spain, it brought together elements that framed the encounter with the New World in a familiar light for droves of Spaniards. That familiarity served to legitimate a greater civilizational mission in the face of new challenges.

Rather than reading each of these thinkers in isolation from each other, I approach them by emphasizing their role in the narrative conquest of nature in the Americas. By way of this original script, I also aim to examine the potential of their attempts to rewrite the story of empire. What sixteenth-century Spaniards found in the Americas was a landscape that challenged existing assumptions about nature, people, and the earth. While many of the marvels of the New World were met with the violence of conquest and colonization, an entire field of study was deployed to catalogue, test, and, in some instances, conserve the diversity of life found in America’s strange lands. Natural history,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constitutive Narratives</th>
<th>Narrative Style</th>
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<td>Chivalric; taxonomical (Oviedo/ Las Casas)</td>
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Compiled by author.
a field of inquiry empowered by a burgeoning empire, was reinvented in light of empirical puzzles that challenged existing European systems of knowledge. Natural historians tasked themselves with explaining how the world should be, but also what made the Americas a suitable space for colonization.

Constitutive Narrative #1: The Narrative of Conquest

For one set of actors in the Americas, the narrative of conquest born in Spain was expanded to include a monstrous and unpredictable natural world, not just an allegedly uncivilized opponent. In this view, the unknown and exotic were used as proof of God’s favored view of the Spaniards as bearers of the Christian faith, as well as Satan’s exile from Heaven into a forgotten and dangerous world of seduction. A cosmic battle was waged to defend both nation and faith. For another set of imperial agents, the drives behind conquest demanded moral and spiritual reform. Spaniards had been seduced by evil to wage war on the New World; if there was any hope for either, proper cultivation of the land and its inhabitants’ souls had to take place. Therefore, reconquering the natural world in the Americas had to take place through a “conquest of narrative” itself.

As the first of three distinctive styles, the narrative of conquest displays the evolution of the Reconquista narrative between the publication of Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo’s Sumario de la Natural Historia de las Indias (1526) and Bartolomé de Las Casas’s Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias (1552). In this time, early natural historians emphasized two aspects of nature in the New World: its seemingly endless abundance and its constitutive role in the formation of indigenous polities. Natural history was conceived as a kind of “public mirror” to engage wider European audiences—at once confirming or deflecting European preconceptions around religion, psychological development, and the necessary elements of civilization in the Americas.

Like the writers of epic romances before him, for example, Oviedo wrote of an exotic, liminal land populated by eroticized pineapples and delicious iguanas. As court historian, his attempt to collect and classify as much as possible of the New World’s environments led him to posit American nature as an inviting space, where, in Kathleen Ann Myers’s words, “the reader can praise the wonders of God’s creation.” Yet when writing of the arduous tasks he endured to produce his General and Natural History of the Indies, Oviedo nevertheless finds great uncertainty in the experience of New World nature, hoping that his readers will: “be satisfied with what I have seen and lived with many dangers . . . enjoy it and suffer none of them, and may he [sic] be able to
read it in his own country without undergoing such hunger and thirst, heat and cold, or innumerable other travails, without venturing into storms at sea, nor the misfortunes one suffers in those lands.  

Las Casas, as well, saw in the Americas a lost Edenic paradise. In his mind, seemingly untouched lands and peoples were proof that God had once ruled over this allegedly new space and that Spanish Conquest threatened its pristine order. As he reports on the kingdoms of Naco and Honduras, for instance, before the arrival of conquering Spaniards they had “seemed a true paradise of delights and were more populous than the most frequented and populous land on earth. And now we have passed there and come that way, and we saw them in such devastation and so wanting in inhabitants that any person, however hard he might be, his heart would break in grief to see it.”

Both men therefore viewed the environments of the New World as spaces of great beauty, but also great uncertainty and instability. Though the sources of that volatility vary—for Oviedo they emerge from the native peoples, for Las Casas from the Spaniards—key in their rhetorical strategies is to place upon Imperial Spain a kind of providential charge to take responsibility over that for which they were now master narrators.

Las Casas, for instance, was awestruck by the great extent to which land, animals, and peoples seemed to emerge as if from nowhere. Having commented extensively on the epistemological expectations that early European travelers brought with them in the first stages of the encounter, Tzvetan Todorov describes Las Casas’s affection for American nature as a theoretical source for modern applications of natural law. More specifically, for Las Casas, the Amerindian relation to nature represented a model of what life in the Edenic paradise most likely resembled.

While Las Casas did not complete his monumental account of the origins of the New World’s peoples, the Apologética historia summaria de las gentes de estas Indias, he continued a practice of using eyewitness experience that helped frame his broader arguments regarding the moral dimensions of the New World’s environments, including the politics of race and the religious ends of empire. Compiled in 1560, the Apologética historia is regarded by contemporary observers as a “proto-ethnographic treatise,” the heart of which is Las Casas’s use (in Rolena Adorno’s words) of “classical and medieval environmental theories . . . [applying] them to the Antilles, demonstrating that the archipelago was a most propitious place to favor humanity and foster the development of a benign human nature.”

Las Casas’s contributions are generally contrasted to those of Oviedo, who as the official royal chronicler of the empire popularized a vision of the Americas
that was more in line with European desires to master the continent’s novelty. As he writes in the Preface to his *General and Natural History*, “What mortal understanding can comprehend such diversity of languages, habits, [or] customs among the people of the Indies? Such variety of animals, from domestic to wild and savage? Such an unutterable multitude of trees, [some] laden with diverse kinds of fruit and others barren, both those which the Indians cultivate as those produced by Nature’s own work without the aid of human hands?”

Though the two chroniclers differ in their portrayal of American nature as either epistemologically or spiritually incommensurable, they share a conceit common to Spanish natural history to see New World nature as timeless. Like many of their contemporaries, both men were shocked to find that such a vast world could have existed unbeknownst to the “Old World” and its litany of learned men. The great desire for knowledge of the New World’s mysteries therefore contributed to its representation as a space from which only the properly trained historian could garner temporally relevant, practical, and authoritative meaning (as in Oviedo’s case), or, as a space untouched by the degradation and vices of modernity and capable of redeeming all its inhabitants (as with Las Casas).

As spaces seemingly frozen in time, the Americas offered contrapuntal models of regeneration for European travelers. In Las Casas’s vision, the Americas’ temporal and moral superiority was reflected in lush and vibrant landscapes; in Oviedo’s story, hybrid creatures, languid peoples, and seductive terrains populated the New World as a land of epistemological strife, a realm divorced from the domain of the knowable. Many of the sixteenth-century chronicles of nature are couched between these extremes. No consensus existed over the proper narrative terms that historians should use to witness, portray, and understand the events of the conquest. Yet as Spanish colonizers became more adept and immersed in the American environment, these narrative poles gave way to more comparative strategies and a greater concern with cultural appropriation.

Moral appropriation of the natural world, as a corruptive or salutary environment, is one of the implications stemming from the *Reconquista* as transplanted narrative to the New World. With the discovery of new lands and peoples, the chronicle of *La Reconquista* was ably deployed through the two mediums of travel narratives and epic poems. In particular, the travel narrative acted as an expression of distinct civilizational prejudices concerning masculinity, faith, and textual authority, as well as served to portray the Americas as a repository of licentious desires. What more patriotic a journey could subjects of a great empire partake in than the conquering of a New World?

One answer to this question comes from the epic poems written during the
Reconquista and later adapted to the circumstances of New World exploration. In the classical epic poems, the Iberian territory was portrayed as a feminine space in need of salvation from the corruptive Moorish caliphs. Coupled with a conception of manly virtue that championed virility (in battle, as well as subjugation), the Reconquista narrative deployed religious overtones that depicted priests as knights in pursuit of Satan and his allies.\textsuperscript{49} During the conquest of the Americas, the same literary tropes found sustained expression. Campaigns were portrayed as expansions of Catholic Providence, where imperial agents were actively plotted against by Satan. Notable in these narratives was the conception of the natural environment itself as being allied to demonic forces. One finds examples of this narrative trope across all three of the puzzles I explore below, but none as polemical as in the earlier Edenic writings of Oviedo and Las Casas.

Oviedo and Las Casas drew conflicting lessons from the Reconquista. Oviedo saw conquest as an opportunity for projecting Spain’s glory onto a corrupt colonial canvas; the oddities and monstrosities in the Americas served to legitimate the myth of a world perverted by Satan and the need for Spain to conquer it. In that light, conquest served the function of crafting a new portrait of empire and imperial history. Las Casas, on other hand, saw conquest as a mirror in which Spaniards could reflect on how far they had strayed from their professed faith. New World nature was proof that God had set indigenous peoples apart from the corrupt forces of modernity, so that Europeans may learn from them. Spanish violence against these prebiblical peoples and landscapes only brought Spaniards closer to Satan himself.

A closer look at nature and the ways indigenous peoples lived with the earth, Las Casas argued, would show Spaniards a better path and lifestyle toward salvation. New arts of reading and interpreting indigenous systems of knowledge would emerge here and begin to gather a solid scholarly standing. Early conquerors had emphasized the readings of signs and the production of literary scripts as markers of mental, social, and technological development in the Americas.\textsuperscript{50} In the land itself, agriculture and urbanization became the visual cues highlighting dominium over nature. As debates ensued over the veracity and reliability of early Edenic writings on American nature, ethnography played a greater role in developing typologies of cultural difference.

Constitutive Narrative #2: Demonology as Anthropology

Modern theorists of history and social progress, such as those emerging from the Scottish and French Enlightenments, challenged Spanish writings from
Central to their disagreements was finding the proper way of framing the Americas, and the phenomenon of historical writing more broadly, as part of a growing self-conscious science of man. Key to this science was the typology of historical stages that emerged to substantiate previous analogies between the Ancient and New Worlds.

As Enlightenment theorists castigated Spanish chroniclers for letting their prejudices get too much in the way of their documentation of the American world, Franciscan missionaries such as Bernardino de Sahagún had already developed great comparative systems that offered the raw material for Scottish stadial theories. In these systems, one finds representations of the Americas as a repository of cultural deviance that needed to be archived, coded, and withdrawn from circulation, so that proper cultivation of Catholic values could take place. The principal task of the ethnographer, as Sahagún saw it, was to “light all the words of this [Nahuatl] language with their literal and metaphoric meanings and all their manners of speech and the greater part of their antiquities, good and evil.” Yet in his exposure to the land and people, the natural world was catalogued as a source of both order and fear.

A popular misconception of this period, known as the Spiritual Conquest, is to see Spanish missionaries as agents of destruction. Figures like Sahagún, however, established great repositories of cultural, political, and medicinal knowledge, thanks largely to the conscription of indigenous informants. Unlike Oviedo and Las Casas, Sahagún saw indigenous peoples as potential allies in Imperial Spain’s cosmic mission, but also susceptible underlings to a covert satanic past.

Las Casas had already gone to great lengths to invert the traditional conquest narrative into a “naturalist epic” documenting the spiritual treasures to be reaped from a greater understanding of the New World’s natural order. His work, alongside Sahagún’s collaboration with indigenous scribes, is an evident turning point in the conquest of narrative, as literary and ethnographic sensibilities converged with distinct civilizational objectives. Sahagún, for example, arrived in the Americas committed to the Church’s evangelizing mission. Through his efforts at conversion in New Spain, however, he developed an unrivaled catalogue of cultural, religious, linguistic, and social practices in Aztec society that culminated in the renowned *Florentine Codex* (1545–1590), which aimed to counsel colonial authorities in the proper ways to indoctrinate indigenous peoples, but occasioned a more dynamic legacy.

As he strived to understand the world of the Nahua people, Sahagún developed one of the first systematic ethnographies aimed at differentiating between
practices that were amenable to the Christian faith and those inextricable from satanic influence. Yet paradoxically, the work was only possible through the shared knowledge of indigenous conscripts who, together with Sahagún, compiled one of the most comprehensive indigenous accounts of the New World’s Conquest. In the Codex, Sahagún and his informants develop a natural history employing Aztec knowledge of the Valley of Mexico prior to the arrival of Spanish conquerors.57 Much like his efforts to compare and reconcile existing Nahua religious practices with central rites of Christianity, Sahagún’s natural history blends indigenous methods of collection with the growing emphasis on textual evidentiary standards emerging in Spanish natural history. His efforts, moreover, represent a surprisingly ambivalent appropriation of indigenous local knowledge and belief systems.

That these moments of cultural miscegenation occurred in the interest of religious conversion should not be understated. Similarly, the notorious Inquisitor Diego de Landa, known for the cataloguing and subsequent destruction of thousands of Mayan codices, books, and other documents, also plays an important role in the evolution of natural history. While it is difficult to situate de Landa in the naturalist tradition, his role in the Spiritual Conquest fulfills a contrapuntal position to Sahagún, similar to that discussed above between Las Casas and Oviedo. Charged with the task of uncovering and destroying heretical documents, de Landa wrote of Mayan society well after its collapse; these writings became one of the few remaining records left in the aftermath of the conquest. According to Anthony Pagden, what we find in de Landa is not just the zealous missionary eager to destroy indigenous culture, but also “an assiduous chronicler of Indian affairs”; his example portrayed “an important stage in the history of the relationships between the friars and their Indian charges, between the ancient Indian peoples of America and their European conquerors.”58 What we therefore see in de Landa is the darker side of natural history as an imperial strategy.

The participation of Spanish missionaries in the mutual destruction and conservation of naturalist data also points to larger inconsistencies in the early deployment of empire. Making sense of the political realities on the ground required taking stock of the great diversity of oral, written, and archival knowledge on the New World; doing so also meant identifying indigenous scholarly attitudes and practices to legitimate further expeditions.59 Sahagún’s work was thus an act of great creativity and boldness, as he found himself likely adopting more of the indigenous cosmology he was supposed to extirpate than what likely sat comfortably with imperial authorities.

The anthropological ethos born out of Sahagún’s efforts, hence achieved
two lasting transformations in the study of natural history. First, it formalized the exotic character of Amerindian society and nature in a systematic effort to know how to control all sources of subversive knowledge. In his anthropological system, Sahagún separated Amerindian cultures from the natural world, contributing to a vision of nature itself as bifurcated. Herein is the second transformation: as nature came to represent a source of order (such as in the geographic knowledge the Nahuas offered Sahagún), it also became a source of fear, representing the seductive and degenerative qualities Spaniards inferred would destroy them.

In addition to the “Constitutive Narratives” from which these conceptions of the New World were born, how these narratives were juxtaposed by Spanish natural historians in the framing of an imperial project reveals natural history’s political nature. Sahagún’s *Florentine Codex*, for instance, is indispensable as it espouses both great contextual and ethnographic detail, as well as betrays a distinctly imperial normative agenda. Hence this second moment in the evolution of Spanish natural history saw the appropriation and transformation of indigenous empirical frameworks into objects to be destroyed, but also found insights deemed worthy of conserving. Sahagún’s observations increasingly formed part of a practice of demonology: the study of the supernatural by way of allegedly occult practices and rituals. While there is no doubt that Sahagún’s efforts were part of the broader goal of destroying idolatry and facilitating religious conversion, his efforts to conserve some kinds of indigenous sources befits speculation. Indeed, the subsequent events following Sahagún’s encounter with indigenous conceptions of nature may reveal how the “Narrative Effects” of natural history were taken up politically.

For Sahagún (and later, the Jesuit José de Acosta), the collection of indigenous rituals was meant to craft field guides for what future generations of imperial agents might expect to find on the ground as colonization (and conversion) expanded. Some practices were more tolerated than others and it took a particular ethnographic judgment to determine which were more suitable. For another set of explorers and surveyors, data collection was part of understanding how to survive in an entirely alien world. Beyond conversion, imperial agents were interested in managing people, ideas, and resources. With no anthropological data on how best to do this, chroniclers and colonizers would be left without any conceptual mooring. Worse yet, they would be free to blatantly pillage and destroy. New World nature may have been originally perceived as a source of turmoil, but Spaniards’ long-term survival depended on reconciling how indigenous peoples lived in the past with the emergence of a new political order.
Constitutive Narrative #3: Naturalist Dissonance

The last generation of natural historians I consider faced different political circumstances than their predecessors. Despite their proximity to the seats of imperial and colonial power, Francisco Hernández and José de Acosta each left behind disparate intellectual legacies. For both, exploration of the American landscape provided an unprecedented opportunity for the testing of philosophical assumptions prevalent in Europe since the Ancient Greeks. As natural history was a vehicle for intellectual exploration, it was also a formal venue to properly inform the theological ends of empire. But like Las Casas and Sahagún before them, Hernández and Acosta aimed to get a personal sense of the Amerindians and their environments.

The Jesuit natural historian José de Acosta, for example, is primarily known for having raised one of the most important challenges to the ideological dominance of Scholastic philosophy on purely empirical grounds. As the master discourse of Medieval Europe, Scholasticism's authority rested on St. Thomas Aquinas's synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy with Christian theology. While theology and philosophy are considered separate fields of inquiry today, Acosta's mastery of experiential, biblical, and philosophical knowledge pushed the limits of what Scholastic thought could achieve. His ambitious Historia Natural y Moral de Las Indias (1590) influenced explorers, theologians, and natural philosophers in the Americas and Europe alike. Yet as Cañizares-Esguerra points out, Acosta's writings are singled out today more as the work of an ethnographer and a geographer than of a natural philosopher interested in both the mechanics and purpose of things. The kind of work he inaugurated, however, was no less than an attempt at “modifying dominant narratives of marvels . . . constantly [seeking] to frame natural phenomena and the seeming inversion of physical laws in the Indies with a discourse of providential design and lawful regularities.”

Acosta framed his criticism of dogmatic conceptions of natural law and cosmological order on the experiential basis of Spanish cosmographers, who in their exploration of the Americas' landscape pioneered a form of understanding both ethnographic and nationalistic. More specifically, Acosta was part of a line of scholars who shifted attention from studying nature as an object of unchanging laws subject to classical interpretations, to a realm that demanded thoughtful redescription and informed classification. Speaking of the scales used to weigh silver, for instance, Acosta writes how “it is a delicate job and requires great skill, which Divine Scripture also mentions in different places to indicate how God tests his chosen and to take note of the differences and
merits and worths of souls . . . which is the proper activity of the spirit of God, who weighs the souls of men.”

Among the naturalist predecessors Acosta admired was the Imperial doctor Francisco Hernández, who was appointed to lead a massive botanical expedition that would cost him much anguish, money, and hard-earned prestige. Although less prone to theological aspirations, perhaps no other Spanish naturalist of the sixteenth century could amass as many botanical catalogues as Hernández did, particularly having relied so heavily on indigenous sources and practices. In the scant seven years it was officially sanctioned, the Hernández Expedition (1570–77) arguably collected more empirical and ethnographic data on the natural environments of New Spain than all previous attempts combined. In 1570, both men were sent to the New World under different auspices: Hernández was appointed as protomedico (physician-in-chief) by King Philip II to head an ambitious natural expedition in the wide valleys and mountains of New Spain; Acosta was sent as head of the Jesuit mission in Peru, and chair of theology at the University of Lima, to document the religious challenges that Jesuit missionaries faced in the conquered, but never truly subdued, Peruvian highlands. The two men’s expeditions were meant to compile very similar reports for the monarchy, yet their findings brought them unique empirical and political challenges.

Hernández’s work was never published in his lifetime due to many personal, political crises in New Spain as well as Europe. On the other hand, Acosta published his findings as a missionary field manual that, in its philosophical scope at least, far surpassed Hernández’s work. While Acosta has been increasingly regarded as an example of the Renaissance spirit of scientific inquiry—a natural philosopher interested in making sense of Amerindian culture, history, and the whole earth—Hernández’s credentials as a humanist and exemplary proponent of the Spanish Renaissance have long been celebrated, yet mostly as a botanist. Their work gained political prominence, however, in an imperial culture that relied on empirical information of the elements and properties of natural resources to supplement its material power. Hernández’s mission, though medical in nature, served to initiate the empire’s efforts at a systematized catalogue of indigenous pharmacological knowledge. Acosta’s writings on minerals and their distribution across the earth were also used by miners who sought to patent tools, gadgets, and testing practices. This attention to utility was one of the dimensions that shaped their distinct political trajectories.

As Hernández noted in a poem to his friend the philologist Arias Montano, there were many in New Spain and across the empire who did not view his task with much approval. “There are those who snap at my heels,” he wrote, “and
spread the poison of envy, who try to damn my innocuous labors, which they will not see, or—if they read them—even understand.”68 King Philip II’s waning interest in natural science can be attributed to the ability of Hernández’s enemies to successfully loosen natural history’s grasp on the empire’s political imagination.69 Though Hernández never gave many clues as to the identity of his detractors, his confessions do reveal that he returned to Spain a hopeful, but broken man.

My own contention, which I will argue further in chapter 4, is that Hernández is a primary illustration of the complex relationship between scientific knowledge and state power emerging out of the early modern period. By Hernández’s time, natural historians had garnered significant ideological and political influence in the empire’s courts. Yet increasing disagreements over the future course of the empire—coupled with the growing costs of war against other European powers—saw the study of natural history fall out of favor as a political priority. Spain’s culture of state secrecy kept sensitive information on the New World’s resources locked away. Some argue that such secrecy is the source of Hernández’s relative obscurity outside of historians of Imperial Spain. His case documents a radical break in the empire’s political narrative, whereby natural history is transformed from a mounting intellectual force into an instrumental economic activity. The study of New World nature was thus not a mere scholarly pastime, but rather a debate over the premises on which the so-called Spanish Empire should be built.

As Barrera-Osorio points out, though men like Hernández, and particularly Acosta, were convinced that “the study of nature led to the understanding of the order of nature and, in turn, to the glorification of God,” their wider interpretive field included a larger network of officials, chroniclers, and merchants, all eager to make sense of the Great Book of Nature for their own interests.70 Indeed, both Hernández and Acosta posited a picture of the New World that was sensitive to its distinct cultural and biological diversity, as well as espoused a kind of naturalist theology against the alleged presence of demonic forces in the landscape. Their writings lay the groundwork for an experimental conception of science based on observation and a kind of political ethnology, where greater observation of the New World’s people could serve to better accommodate future colonial expansion.

Yet this was not a fully conscious project. Written toward the ends of their lives, Hernández and Acosta’s works are the product of conflicting sentiments. A kind of naturalist dissonance emerges in their texts, between the potential cognitive and material riches the New World offered and the conceptual challenges it posed to the empire’s ideological objectives. Despite their different
positions, both men’s works were picked up by political theorists and scientists across the continent, giving rise to numerous debates on the value of Spanish contributions to modern scientific inquiry.

Particularly important in Hernández and Acosta’s accounts of New World nature were the effects of the natural environment on the faculty of judgment. The novelty of the New World not only generated great pleasure, but it appealed to the exquisite perceptions and judgments of Spaniards whom Hernández and Acosta deemed critical to the development of a broader imperial ethos. Thus the great empirical contributions of Spanish natural history offered a new, though contentious, narrative layer in the emergence of sixteenth-century imperial science. Ironically, the great intellectual and political glory that Spain sought carried within it the seeds of its future scientific demise.

Despite their radically different trajectories, both the Hernández Expedition and the Historia Natural arrived at an important conclusion: the New World’s natural landscapes represented a Great Book from which Imperial Spain could learn. Hernández may have been politically positioned to take the study of natural history to greater heights. His failure, however, came as a result of changing geopolitical circumstances, not lack of sound reasoning. Study of the natural sciences took a secondary role to the greater need to document available resources. Acosta relied on a different kind of audience to communicate his findings. Tasked with cataloguing and devising the most effective ways of uprooting indigenous idolatry, the more Acosta explored the environments of the Americas, the less sanguine he became about the ability of classical and biblical sources to account for the New World’s diversity. The Historia Natural captures this dissonance, as Acosta outlines a simultaneously empirical and theological framework for the study of natural philosophy. Full of observations on the myriad flora, fauna, and societies of the New World, the work explicitly promotes the interpretation of nature as a Great Book. The result is an incomplete, though revolutionary, call to bring faith into communion with science.

Reconstructing the World of Natural History

While histories of the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment locate the maturation of natural history and natural philosophy under the purview of canonical figures such as Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, and Alexander von Humboldt, my goal so far has been to demonstrate that Spanish missionary naturalists hold an equally indispensable place at the crucible of modern science. Spanish natural historians had been some of the first European thinkers to compare the social and mental development of the New and Old Worlds. Yet
after having developed the narrative strategies to explain New World nature, their contributions were conquered by the preconceptions of Enlightenment progress. Yet as Karen Stolley has pointed out, “For Spanish America the past has often served as a discursive key to an identity that differentiates Spanish America from its European component. In that discursive process,” she maintains, the region “occupies an intermediate zone between making and denying difference, between America and Europe, and between the evocation of a past and an evolving future.”

Although Stolley was writing about the eighteenth century—rife as it was with a revival of naturalistic inquiry of equally global proportions—the same story is often said about Spanish exploration in the sixteenth century. Thinkers outside of Spain, this narrative suggests, revolutionized scientific inquiry by overcoming the religious superstition and intellectual subservience to ecclesiastical authority characteristic of Spanish learned circles. Yet if we empirically consider Spain’s position in the burgeoning intellectual cultures of the early modern era, there are at least three legacies worth recounting to further contest this narrative.

First, as the unchallenged military power of the sixteenth century, Spain explored vast stretches of land and sea unknown to European eyes. Many of the empire’s first geographic missions across the Americas accumulated numerous surveys of administrative and indigenous knowledge of the New World’s lands. These surveys, known as relaciones geográficas, generated a wealth of data that the empire used to distribute administrative, commercial, and strategic resources.

Second, as a highly diffused territorial empire, Spanish subjects in the New World often held competing material interests and political agendas. Merchants and missionaries traversed the same spaces in search of resources to exploit and souls to save. Yet one of the difficulties encountered by contemporary historians of the sixteenth century is the lack of published material illustrating these competing interests. Royal missions were sanctioned to produce reports meant only for the monarchy’s eyes, limiting the circulation of the many findings and recommendations for encountering the New World. Even self-published works required royal approval, though these were also often censored by regulatory and conservative tribunals such as the Inquisition, as the cases of Sahagún and Hernández will illustrate below. In spite of such institutional constraints, Spanish chronicles were nevertheless highly coveted in early modern Europe. Indeed, new literary genres conveying the utopian character of the Americas—from travelogues, to conquest narratives, and especially reports of scientific expeditions—captured the imagina-
tion of learned *criollos* and *peninsulares* alike, all emerging from the efforts to document the multiple testimonies claiming New World experience.  

Third, and finally, natural historians were the first to test the potential ramifications of science as a public endeavor in the New World. As Mauricio Nieto Olarte has noted, the field was fundamental in developing “a medium to build a domesticated nature and a colonized humanity.” Although “science” was regarded as a handmaiden to Imperial Spain, early naturalistic concepts and practices such as ethnology, biogeography, apothecaries, and cosmology were upheld by their proponents as the empirical backbone on which the Spanish monarchy could strengthen its moral claims over the Americas.  

Yet as I show in the following chapters, crisis and ideological dissonance color much of natural history’s political trajectory. The study of natural history was presented by the missionary writings I engage as a central tenet of imperial conquest, capable of shaping the geopolitical interests of the early Spanish Empire, as well as marking the future contours of European science. The field’s own trajectory is thus rife with accusations of intrigue, heresy, and controversy. In order to uncover the overlap between the multiple interpretive layers blurring natural history’s rise and fall, I propose a different focus: to treat its practitioners’ missionary ethos as the core of natural history’s philosophical aspirations.  

A key feature of what I have sought to clarify in this chapter are the links between the spiritual experiences of wonder in early modern natural history and the concrete experiences of nature in the New World. On the one hand, developing proper conceptual frameworks for the study of the natural world in the Americas was part of an effort to naturalize the imperial project. In using the language of the supernatural to couch their findings, Spanish naturalists rendered the experience of wonder in the New World into an adaptive feature of naturalistic thinking. However, it was also a form of political thinking, for to hypothesize the history of an unknown world meant evaluating its character, in addition to cataloging its component parts. This represented a wholesale effort to rationalize the New World’s place within a broader cosmology of European ascendance, a process I have described through the formation of distinct constitutive narratives.  

Stories and chronicles emerging from these ventures can thus be read as attempts to formalize wonder into a concrete philosophical and political category. The subsequent experience of encountering, understanding, and domesticating nature was therefore a critical formative moment of the early Spanish Empire that continues to beg for interpretation. Through four contextual portraits of this larger methodological struggle, I aim to make a compelling
case that the sixteenth century in the Americas was replete with theoretical innovation—scientific and political. Each of the authors I profile adapted their findings to a dominant imperial narrative of cultural appropriation via the use of empirical evidence. In their efforts to recover something beyond the immediately visible, however, they also nominally shifted how that narrative would push the empire forward, putting their efforts into conflict with the competing interests of imperial conquest.

There are three implications to this reading of empire, faith, and nature: the first suggests that human experience in nature is always part of an effort to create values out of the unknown and unfamiliar. Spanish natural history captures both the spirit of modern scientific inquiry and the zealous search for a purpose to human society; it paved the way for an antigrand narrative of modernity and the possibility for greater, though contentious, inclusion of subaltern knowledge.

The second implication is that nature itself was regarded as a prominent actor in the history of the New World. Spanish natural historians recognized the great influence that such radically new environments could have on human industry, learning, and particularly religious salvation. Their visions raised important political and ethical questions: How were such vast lands unknown for so long? What happened to human faculties of judgment in different environments? Where did indigenous people come from? Though many of their conclusions were limited by the political and cultural prejudices of their time, their efforts at social assimilation are nonetheless instructive of the mutual dissonance between nature and society in modernity.

Lastly, Spanish imperialism was no force for ecological harmony—far from it. Yet if we see the newness of the New World as a key component of the emergent forms of political, scientific, and religious governance panning out at the beginning of the sixteenth century, a more nuanced portrait of empire as an ideology of cultivation emerges. Among these forms was the possibility of using the natural environment—as a site allegedly imbued with progressive and degenerative forces—to trace the destinies of human civilization. As I show in later chapters, millenarian beliefs therefore became strong catalysts for early scientific exploration and their popularity proved threatening to the empire’s economic interests.

Making sense of the interpretive and political problems natural historians encountered requires not just a trans-Atlantic understanding of environmental history. It also demands an emphasis on the interplay of context, imagination, and experience in politics that narrative approaches to political theory can provide. By focusing on the ways that natural historians situated the study of...
New World nature within a broader political narrative of conquest, one can il-
huminate the ideological motivations of different mendicant orders and fellow
travelers. Such an approach requires overcoming historiographical biases that
read early modern history as the secularization of thought away from spiritual
concerns. They also require an attention to the power of stories and the differ-
ence they made in the making of an imperial nature.