First Accounts:
The Building Blocks

The encounter between European explorers, conquerors, missionaries, and settlers, on one hand, and the peoples and land of the Americas, on the other, produced a complex discourse from which European thought and fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries built a variety of images of the "original," the "natural," and the "barbaric." Having become acclimated in Europe, these images recrossed the Atlantic and, in the nineteenth century, became indexes of American difference from the colonial powers in an American discourse of political independence and cultural identity. But the accounts of the first contact do not form a master narrative; rather, they provided a repertoire of often conflicting images, available for both a colonizing and a decolonizing discourse.

A random dip into nineteenth-century European fiction gives an idea of how images of the Americas and Americans had become naturalized. In Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, the platitudinous pharmacist Homais berates his wife for making their children wear padded headgear that might impair their mental development and "make them into Caribs or Botocudos" (p. 83). Neither Homais nor Flaubert bothers to gloss the reference, which for Homais denotes mental inferiority and for Flaubert connotes Homais's prejudices. In *Hard Times* Charles Dickens describes Coketown as "a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage" (p. 65); the image of natural man unnaturally painted simultaneously brings up the absence and the excesses of civilization.
The protagonist's dining room in Benito Perez Galdós's *Doña Perfecta* is decorated with copies of French drawings of Columbus's voyages, a satirical portmanteau that attacks Spanish bad taste, Spanish backwardness unredeemed by ancient glory, and Spanish reliance on French prestige to validate that glory. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* opens with Walton's attempt to discover the Northwest Passage and uses sixteenth- and seventeenth-century explorations of the Americas as a type for nineteenth-century scientific advances, of which Dr. Frankenstein is perpetrator and victim and which his story implicitly condemns, causing Walton to turn back. These texts assume a common and widespread (not necessarily accurate) acquaintance with the discoveries and the Americas, and each mention bears a little ideological charge against the sum of which an American image of Americanness would have to prevail.

This common knowledge rests on all the accounts and pictures of the encounter between Europeans and the New World, from Columbus to Alexander von Humboldt. At the time when the New World colonies were seeking political and cultural independence, European views of the America were, on one hand, incorporated in American definitions of the American self and, on the other, rejected and resisted as instances of European scorn and domination. Now, as the literature of the encounter is being reexamined, it may tell us something beyond itself about the workings of such a process of definition. In the awareness of current prejudgments, Peter Hulme's close reading of Columbus's diaries and his letter to Ferdinand and Isabella relating his third voyage (see Diários, pp. 133-47), or of the story of Pocahontas, attempts to reconstruct how these documents shaped new knowledge to the interests and preconceptions of European history. Wayne Franklin's *Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers* begins by examining just one of Columbus's sentences, where he finds *in nuce* a complex set of judgments and attitudes of Europe toward America, as well as the record of an implied American contribution to European discourse about the New World (p. 1). But even as one watches old judgments become established through iteration and selection, one can see present-day critical discourse fall into the classic metaphors of America: Hulme regrets the disappearance of an Edenic America; Franklin would like the dispersed accounts of the encounter to be collected and published as a "wilderness of books," a "swamp" teeming with life (p. 204), like an America of uninscribed nature.

Franklin sees how early accounts of the Americas informed the acqui-
sition, transformation, transmission, and use of knowledge about the New World on either side of the Atlantic; other critics tell us how these reports figure—or prefigure—the character of “Americans.” In *American Incarnation* Myra Jehlen begins her analysis of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature in the United States by identifying William James’s “embrace of the factual by which [he] located himself in the wilderness” as “an impulse from the heart of his American identity.” James has chosen between the two paradigmatic attitudes toward the Americas: Amerigo Vespucci’s practical one, “acknowledging [America] as a concrete fact”; and a “theoretical” attitude, “one of the innumerable versions of America’s primal scene, Columbus arriving on an unknown shore” and unable to make sense of what he saw. For Jehlen, in either case, “the drama of America’s discovery describes an archetypal conjunction of personal identity and national identification coming together in the very earth of the New World” (pp. 2–3). Like other critics, Jehlen derives her distinction between American and non-American from the record of discovery, combining notions of (American) nation, (American) nature, and (American) humanity in accordance with a long history of the discourse of the New World. Yet Jehlen is unusual in pushing the models for a United States discourse about origins back past the English Puritan landing to the first Spanish encounter (p. 237 n. 1). This dislocation of the origin of North American (specifically, U.S.) identity to include Spain manifests both of a love of accuracy and a contemporary shift in perspective: the record of the encounter still responds to the interests of its time and public.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Tzvetan Todorov sees in Columbus’s and Cortez’s letters not only the traces of a conquered New World but also the roots of a divided, totalitarian Europe; *La conquête de l’Amérique* recontextualizes the history of the discoveries for a time when the boundaries between Europe and non-Europe were under question once again. He says he chose his subject because “the conquest of America announces and founds our identity” (p. 13), without explaining the reference of the pronoun “our.” It could mean “European” or “non-American” and thus implicitly criticize the imposition of one culture on another. It could mean “French” (the language of his book), or “non-Spanish,” “non-Portuguese,” “non-English” (the languages of those who colonized most of the Americas and, according to the French, fairly botched it). It could also refer to unequal power relations between Eastern and Western Europe contemporary with the writing, and allow Todorov to claim the authority of both marginal (Eastern,
Bulgarian, homologous to Amerindian) and dominant discourse (Western, French). In any case "our" does not refer to the Americas, the object and result of European conquest; the history Todorov retells is likely indeed to be "closer to myth than to argument" (p. 11). His statement that "we are all the direct descendants of Columbus" (p. 13) may express European guilt; yet it preserves Europe's status as the active subject of American history. It is not likely that he or his readers would accept the cheerful view of the (South) American scholar Germán Arciniegas, who, in *America in Europe*, traces the American roots of European science, humanism, democracy, and freedom and recommends that they be enjoyed, not regretted, by Columbus's progeny, originators of European virtue and happiness. All three critics show that even in America the question of America has never been a question only for America. They also reveal an element of randomness in both the production and reception of these accounts.

Nevertheless, each reading of the French, Spanish, English, and—if it is considered at all—Portuguese discovery and conquest attempts to see it as a more or less coherent inventory of reasons and justifications for the substitution of cultures and populations in the Americas. Such readings can express both the traditional horror of its means and a more modern horror of the substitution as such. The older horror is in fact contemporaneous with the more encomiastic and exegetic accounts of conquest: Bartolomé de las Casas, credited with first articulating it, was seconded by Jesuits, who, because their own form of conquest and substitution depended on garnering souls, defended the persons of their "charges." The Enlightenment then enlivened its opposition to the institutions of church and state by reviving a condemnation of conquest and developing a new kind of benevolent interest in Indians, east and west. The horror in modern analyses of the discourse of conquest, for all that justifies it, may predominate once again because it correlates with a critical view of the civilization where it arises, a disgust not only with its past but also with more recent developments within it.

The references to the Americas in these examples address different audiences. Jehlen and Todorov speak to academics; the novels, to the

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1 For a similar and extended critique of *La conquête d'Amérique*, see Coronil.

2 It is amusing to read Arciniegas's work against G. V. Scammell's "New Worlds and Europe in the Sixteenth Century." Scammell denies that the navigations, discoveries, etc., made more than "some impression" (p. 389) on European civilization, whose rhythm of development, he says, went on pretty much as it had before all that overrated colonial drama.
general public. The academic analyses revalue and re-estrange; the novels show how familiar the Americas had become in European discourse by the nineteenth century. That familiarity allowed for incoherence, for positive views of American innocence and for negatively valued ideas of savagery in the Americas or hybris in the conquering European powers. Though Walton is relieved when Dr. Frankenstein on his ice floe turns out to be civilized and not "a savage inhabitant of some undiscovered island" (p. 23), Frankenstein's creature is later described positively as a "natural man" made savage by the underlying savagery of European civilization. With the creature's attempt to learn language, history, reading, and writing, Mary Shelley restates the notion that the savage New World differs from the civilized Old in lacking a history and a written language. In the attempted correction of this lack, she raises all the ethical and ontological problems in the discourse of otherness.

Even in the cursory examples I have given, neither this discourse nor that upon which it is built is simple or uniform; they record different attitudes toward and evaluations of the New World, just as the early accounts by explorers, conquerors, and settlers differ according to the time, circumstances, audience, and purpose of the writing, according to the things described and the character of the writer. Their effect differs according to their public, the time of dissemination, the uses to which they were put. Together, the accounts form a repository of narrative fragments that, like the bits of glass in a kaleidoscope, fall into different patterns as the tube turns. They are, in any case, not simply the reiterated statement of an opposition between civilizing European and savage American.

Thus, the choice of Columbus as originator of the discourse of the Americas is already the beginning of an interpretation: Jehlen, after all, chose Vespucci. But as Peter Hulme shows, an analysis of Columbus's diaries and letter can also yield the germ of a discourse of the American other. Philology and a history of the anthropology of Amerindian populations show how its meaning was constructed in the service of the European economic and ideological exploitation of the continent. Hulme refuses to settle the question of whether Amerindians "really" ate human flesh and concentrates on verifying the truth of assertions that they did; by implication, he thus demands a critical and distrustful reading of the entire written record of the encounter (chap. 2, "Caribs and Arawaks"). Such a reading retains the validity of that record but makes it release a different knowledge: in "Pocahontas," Hulme recovers the "other" side of the encounter with John Smith and reinter-
interprets English accounts of that interaction by reconstructing or reimagining the mentalité of Pocahontas's people (chap. 3). For Hulme the documents of the encounter must be read aslant and all in concert.

No account, then, is sufficient. Though Columbus was the first to encounter and record American otherness, even Todorov considers his view eccentric. And this meeting between a fifteenth-century Genoese and Caribs leads to meetings between sixteenth-century Spaniards and Mexicans, between Jesuits and the Amerindians of Brazil or Canada, between new Christian merchants and pagans, between Portuguese colonists and enslaved Tapuias, between the ill-humored Martin Frobisher and the Inuit, between an intrigued and delighted Pero Vaz de Caminha and the apparently no less intrigued inhabitants of the northeast coast of Brazil, or between French or Dutch Protestants and Brazilian tribes. And if the monsters and marvels of Pierre d'Ailly, which Columbus kept in his library and carried in his mind, colored his view of the Caribbean, Vespucci's Italian Neoplatonism was no less of a European-constructed lens trained on the New World (Arciniegas, pp. 60, 63–65).

New World otherness is not fixed, then, but looks different to different viewers and to different periods. By the eighteenth century the Americas, no longer a theater of immediate, heroic action, had become a reservoir of concepts and examples for the expression of new and politically significant European notions of culture, origin, and history. Like Todorov's, the Enlightenment's resort to the American record responded to its own time and preoccupations. But the more timely this use of the historical record, the more inevitable seemed its conclusions. This impression of inevitability grounds the plausibility of interpretive discourse; it makes history appear as a self-justifying system, events determined and explained by ideological necessity: history as a highway. In the welter of accounts, however, history is a random net of forking paths and detours. Without the background of randomness, the concept of determination would be unnecessary; it is as essential to the tragic reading of the conquest presented with ample justification by Todorov as it is to the triumphalist reading that preceded it. Both im-

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3 A centerpiece of Hulme's argument is the shift in meaning from the term "Carib," used at first to designate a population, to "cannibal," and Columbus's role in effecting it. I am using the term imprecisely, to mean the original inhabitants of what we now know as the Caribbean.

4 "New Christian" is a literal translation of the Portuguese term for Jews who converted to Christianity in response to early modern persecution.
pose order with an implicit appeal to the ahistorical category of truth, but the approach to any such truth has to be asymptotic, deflected by differences and discontinuities.

Todorov stresses the tragic misalignment between European categories and the nature and cultures of the Americas, the misunderstandings and the unequal power relations between Columbus and his hosts or between Cortez and Montezuma. This account of fatality and responsibility becomes ideologically more complicated when one factors another line of inquiry into the means of conquest. It had long been known that the original population of the Americas was decimated by Europeans in wars and massacres, but new studies changed the meaning of this "decimation": it is not that one in ten original inhabitants died; more likely only one in ten survived the epidemics brought from Europe, Asia, and Africa by the conquerors. But for the aid of smallpox, which in the 1520s spread from Hispaniola to Mexico and then to Peru, killing peasants, merchants, leaders, and warriors of the Aztecs and the Incas, the handful of adventurers under Cortez and Pizarro might have been unable to subjugate the two great American empires. Similarly, a handful of missionaries might have been unable to achieve their mass conversions of American peoples had they not conceivably felt as abandoned by their gods as the Europeans felt favored by Providence. The horror of this demographic catastrophe can only partly be resolved into responsibility.5

In addition, an analysis of the documents which stresses ethics and responsibility may neglect the constraints of interest and even genre informing them. Stephanie Merrim reminds us that Cortez was not only reporting his deeds; he was also writing an apologia for himself, an autobiography, according to established discursive rules. His account is filtered through these rules; it does not give transparent access to the facts of Spanish-Aztec misunderstandings ("Ariadne's thread").

Genre conventions also left their traces on travel accounts that grafted themselves on a classical or medieval tradition of marvelous voyages. This tradition lives in Columbus’s scattered references to fabulous animals, in his bemusement about the existence of pleasant lands in the torrid zone, and in his speculation, in the account of the second voyage, about whether he had found earthly paradise. It fleshes out his description of the banners and their bearers as they first set foot in the New

5See William H. McNeill, Plagues and People, esp. chap. 5; Henry F. Dobyns, Their Number Become Thinned, chap. 2, pp. 34–45; and Chaunu, pp. 60, 365.
World, more circumstantial than his account of the island, where "they saw very green trees, many waters and fruits of various kinds" (11 October 1492). With similar lack of detail, the ship "entered a very beautiful river . . . full of trees, covering its banks from end to end, lovely and green, and different from ours, with flowers and with their fruit. Many birds, large and small, singing with the greatest sweetness" (28 October 1492). Instead of describing the dress and appearance of the islands' inhabitants, he speculates about their potential for conversion or their knowledge of gold mines.

Almost every entry of the diary of the first voyage mentions conversion or gold: Columbus was funded to outflank the Portuguese in their access to the wealth of the Orient. Commentators have consistently noted the promise of increased accumulation of capital with which Columbus's writings prefigure mercantilist domination. But his endeavor also connects with medieval protoscience; he does not see or seek gold for mercantilism, metallurgy, or civilization; he speaks of it as if he hoped to find in the new lands a geographical philosophers' stone. It is the theme of religious expansion that sounds a new note: in its contacts with Islam, Christianity had tried to eradicate or replace a religion it recognized as a rival; Columbus proposed implanting Christianity where he discerned no religion at all. His stance prefigures the importance of missions and missionaries in the colonial project and, more significant, speculation about whether it is possible to recognize humanity in the absence of what can be recognized as culture. The question underlies not only Christianization but also political and psychological theories that in the next two centuries would justify the colonists' resistance against the colonial powers.

Columbus's diaries and letters sometimes mediate and sometimes simply veer between medieval "fancy" and early modern "fact." In his account of the first voyage he clutches at any indication that he has reached the Orient and records hearing the islanders mention Cipango (Japan) or the great khan (24 December, 23 October [when he identifies Cuba as Cipango], 28 October). By the second voyage, when Columbus had still not found the land or the riches described by Marco Polo, his letter to his sponsors, Ferdinand and Isabella, speculates on whether he had not come close to the earthly paradise of balmy climate and luxuriant vegetation shining atop the raised stem end of a pear-shaped Earth, so unlike the dry, torrid lands at the same latitude east (Diários, "Third Voyage," p. 145). The substitution of an eschatological goal—the earthly paradise—for the initial economic one is a regression to
earlier fabulous explorations, an attempt to conflate the old world, in which the unknown still functioned as an appendix to Christianity, with the new one, which had to be won for religion.

The fiery lands and balmy islands of medieval voyages are themselves reread in the light of the discoveries. David Quinn, Alison Quinn, and Susan Hillier imply such a rereading when they place Saint Brendan's *Navigatio* at the beginning of their great anthology of early modern travel accounts. In the *Navigatio* the saint and his followers discover an island that "shyned as bright as the sonne" with flowers, fruits, and precious stones—a generic description not unlike Columbus's. The voyagers delight in the vegetation and promise riches gathered without toil in the contradictory conjunction of value and availability characteristic of a paradisiacal economy later sought in the New World. But they also land on a volcanic island of hell, whose hairy "feendes," forges, and balls of fire show the negative, hostile, and evil face of unknown places, and they state a third great topos of the later tales of discovery, with the theological and allegorical dimension of their voyage. Its parts coincide with the divisions of the canonical year; the islands illustrate states of the soul; their availability to humanity depends on the conversion of the world, for they will become manifest when all nations are "brought to subjection" under Christianity (Quinn, i:65). The "feendes," however, are moral, not ontological, others, and the conflation of these two realms of difference is at least as important for the operation of American otherness as the question of otherness itself.

The differences among the tales of Saint Brendan's, Fernão Mendes Pinto's, and Mandeville's voyages and later accounts are important too. As J. H. Parry points out, it was only in the late fifteenth century, "as the search for India by sea got seriously under way," that the *Travels* of Marco Polo began to replace those of Mandeville as sources of accurate information (p. 8). This shift to the "factual" signals a more general discursive turn from tradition, authority, and faith to empirical evidence and experience as guarantors of the accuracy of fabulous-sounding fifteenth- and sixteenth-century accounts by discoverers and explorers.

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6 Hulme discusses the fabulous elements in Marco Polo's tale and argues that, given contemporary knowledge about the rest of the world, readers would understandably find one as believable as the other.

7 Even Mandeville's accounts served to destabilize old certainties and could be used to oppose established authorities. Recall Ginzburg's miller from an isolated village in Italy, who derived in part from Mandeville the heretical idea that alien customs were equivalent to Christianity, for which he was eventually condemned to death by the Inquisition.
Yet it is significant that an old dichotomous and eschatological structure persisted under these empirical claims.

This epistemological shift did not take place unawares, as we can see in Giovanni da Verrazzano's Letter to the king of France. Verrazzano measures coasts and routes for the sake of science as well as conquest and defends his observations as true because they are scientific, even if they contradict Aristotle and centuries of church-sponsored, church-sanctioned explanations of the world (Quinn, 1:288). But Verrazzano applies the scientific model only to the natural world; when he describes morals or manners, and finds the Amerindians friendly, sweet, and gentle, he compares them to the ancients (1:283), establishing an epistemological distinction between morals and science: the ancients' authority validates morals but cannot confirm science. In knowledge Europe has surpassed the ancient authorities, but in behavior his sailors are inferior to the savages, who live in a golden age from which Europe has fallen. Jacques Cartier, too, corrects by experience a traditional geography based on authority. The ancients are wrong to have believed that only two of the five zones of the world are inhabitable: “They formed that opinion from some natural reasonings, whence they drew the basis of their argument, and with these contented themselves without adventuring or risking their lives in the dangers they would have incurred, had they tried to test their statements by actual experience” (in Quinn, 1:305). Cartier has taken the risk, tested the reasoning, and he knows better.

Slowly, the newer accounts supplant the older tales. They give specific information about navigation, about the geography of distant coasts, about the fauna and flora of the New World; they inform and entertain a public with new interests. Convinced that the new lands were not the Orient, the expeditions' sponsors needed to learn what was there and how to get it. The Spanish and Portuguese wanted to safeguard their new possessions; other nations wanted to justify their attempts to share in the bounty; the general public found interest in the pageant of religious and national rivalries brought to light by rapidly multiplying printed matter. As we define various interests, some of the entwined strands of Columbus's diaries and letters are untangled. His repeated assurances that “these Indians are docile and good for receiving orders and making them work, plant, and all that which will be necessary, and for building villages and learning to go dressed and follow our customs” (16 December 1492) reappear in the letters of missionaries and settling companies. His thirst for signs of gold—an old man said
“there were many islands around, a hundred leagues or more way, as far as it could be understood, where much gold grows, and on others, saying there was one of pure gold” (18 December 1942)—reappears in the accounts of explorers. Though the fabulous and mystical elements survive into the next centuries, they began to be overshadowed by a demand for the newly important category of empirical fact.\(^8\)

At least this distinction between medieval fable and modern report, the orderly progress from former to latter, seems widely acceptable as a reading of the written record of the navigations, supported by the political, cultural, and economic power of Western European—French, English, German—cultural discourse. Even here, however, an alternative reading is possible, illustrating the unexpected difference of a view from the margin. A Luso-Brazilian version of the encounter between Old and New Worlds by the Brazilian historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, based upon Portuguese documents generally ignored among travel accounts, offers the properly eccentric argument that the Portuguese present few signs of the Italo-Spanish excesses that Todorov, for instance, finds in Columbus’s letters. In Portuguese accounts cupidity is kept in (relative) check by the scarcity of mines or even signs of gold, while the fabulous and the marvelous tend to be clearly identified as hearsay and outweighed by a sober and matter-of-fact reporting of New World strangeness (Visão do paraíso, p. 3). Holanda also reverses customary notions of medieval and Renaissance turns of mind; he finds Portuguese accounts archaic in style and matter, medieval in attitude; they look upon secular matters with a cold, almost “objective” or scientific eye, while relegating the marvelous and the fabulous to the separate realm of the spirit (or, more prosaically, of rumor). It is the Renaissance, Holanda believes, which, by transferring the foundation of all knowledge from the supernatural to the natural, located in the world of the senses all phenomena, including the most countersensical; it is in the world of the Renaissance that everything is possible in general and most things are probable across the Atlantic. Thus the “Portuguese exploration of the west coast of Africa and then of the distant lands and seas of the Orient could, in a way, be compared to a vast enterprise of exorcism” (p. 15), compensating with its refusal to fantasize for its small contribution to the formation of the “so-called myths of conquest” (p. 10).

\(^8\) The fabulous creatures of early travel tales live on, in fantasy and children’s literature; C. S. Lewis’s Voyage of the “Dawn Treader” revives some of Mandeville’s curious entities. See especially chap. 11, “The Dufflepuds Made Happy,” pp. 137–62.
Holanda's shot from the sidelines reminds us that even within the play of oppositions between medieval and modern, fantasy and knowledge, the data can be organized in more than one plausible way. It is not necessary to choose medieval over modern to introduce a slight shift in the allocation of discursive power; that small deflection toward Portugal could begin to reposition an argument. G. V. Scammell's interpretation, by contrast, works to prevent such a shift; he too notes the sobriety of Portuguese accounts but attributes it to the influence of Italian and Netherlandic humanism in Iberia, whose youth studied at Louvain, Bologna, and Florence and whose universities, Alcalá, Salamanca, and Coimbra, "were in varying degrees centers for the dissemination of humanist doctrines" ("The New Worlds and Europe," p. 398). Buarque de Holanda wants to argue for Portuguese—and, by inheritance, Brazilian—difference from a generic "European" colonial experience; Scammel wants to argue that European culture was little affected by colonization. Though the readings of the original material converge, each argument feeds a different interpretation.

In turn, the early writings from the New England colonies give another spin to the dichotomy between sober account and embroidered fantasy. Long after Renaissance rationality was agreed to have superseded medieval suprarationality, these writings describe a religious pageant in which "providences" take the place of secular causality, fiends reappear in the shape of Indians, and monsters are born to women of doubtful doctrinal orthodoxy.9

In time more, and more accurate, information about the New World became part of common European knowledge, but it was not disseminated in an orderly way. Hulme disentangled from all others the thread of logical and ideological arguments leading from Columbus's first mention of rumors about people who ate human flesh to the fully developed image of the fearsome American cannibal. Other threads took their own long and circuitous routes to common knowledge. The information in the letter of Pero Vaz de Caminha to the king of Portugal about the voyage to Brazil was buried as Portugal looked east and its power waned before that of Spain. That in missionaries' letters, such as the Jesuit relations, reached a large lay public. The letter from the Chevalier de Villegagnon to John Calvin on the attempt to establish a Huguenot French colony in the bay of Guanabara and the disputatious reports of stories of such monsters and "providences" appear with doctrinal force in Cotton Mather (Magnalia, 2:404–5), Increase Mather (Remarkable Providences, pp. 252–55), and John Winthrop (Journal, 1:266–68), for example.

9Stories of such monsters and "providences" appear with doctrinal force in Cotton Mather (Magnalia, 2:404–5), Increase Mather (Remarkable Providences, pp. 252–55), and John Winthrop (Journal, 1:266–68), for example.
the Calvinist preacher Jean de Léry (considered foundational by de Certeau) and the friar André Thévet, who accompanied that expedition, were widely available in multiple editions and translations. Some letters to kings, such as those of Columbus or Verrazzano, influenced policy as well as ideology.¹⁰ Verrazzano's description of the New World as a *locus amoenus*, a pleasant place, endowed with "a sweet fragrance" (Quinn, 1:282) and inhabited by gentle people lacking social organization and even idols, who could easily be shaped by the colonizers, informed the Edenic view of the Americas. These images of pleasure provided a consistent and durable counterpoint to images of distaste and fear which led to the rise of the cannibal, and at times even softened the image of the anthropophagi.

Because of vagaries of distribution the influence of some documents was not contemporaneous with their writing, and such disjunctions affected the weight of variously important texts in the "canon" of discovery and settlement documents. There does not seem to be a good reason for the different publication histories of the two perfectly conventional works of Pero de Magalhães Gandavo on Brazil, but the *História da província de Santa Cruz* appeared almost immediately after it was written, three years after *Tratado da terra do Brasil*, which was suppressed for more than three hundred fifty years and was brought to light only over the objections of the Portuguese crown by the French historian H. Ternaux-Compans in 1837.¹¹

More noteworthy is the story of the letter from Pero Vaz de Caminha to the Portuguese king Dom Manuel on the voyage to Vera Cruz, now Brazil. The king used this first official document about Portuguese occupation of transatlantic lands to inform the king of Spain that Portugal was taking possession of what it had been awarded by the Treaty of Tordesillas.¹² After this one political use, however, the letter disap-

¹⁰ Their circulation was often determined by style of government: Henry Kamen finds that the "Portuguese exercised strict control over information about their trade, but the Spaniards were never so secretive and allowed free exchange of ideas" (*European Society, 1500–1700*, p. 11).

¹¹ See the introduction by Capistrano de Abreu to the edition of both works by the University of São Paulo Press. Apparently the *Tratado* was written around 1570 although first published only in 1837; the *História* was written and published in 1576.

¹² This treaty was signed between Spain and Portugal to settle conflicts arising from Columbus's first voyage. In 1493 Pope Alexander VI drew a line running from pole to pole a hundred leagues west of Cape Verde, all lands to the west of which would fall to Spain. King João II of Portugal complained that too little space was left for Portuguese exploration of the African route to the east, and on 7 June 1494, the Portuguese and Spanish negotiators met at Tordesillas and, while reaffirming the idea of the division of the world, moved the line to 370 leagues west of Cape Verde,
peared, deemed, according to Jaime Cortesão, important but not of general public interest. Thus the letter had no part in forming a European discourse of the New World, but it became important when, after a couple of mentions in the eighteenth-century account of the discoveries by the Spanish historian Juan Bautista Muñoz, it reappeared in the 1817 *Corografia brasílica* of Father Manuel Aires de Casal (pp. 21–27, n. 11). At the time, the Portuguese empire was being governed from Rio de Janeiro, João VI of Portugal and his court having fled there to escape Napoleon, and the colony had begun to enjoy its new power. Rediscovered, the letter was seen no longer as an official certificate of Portuguese domain (Cortesão, p. 71) but as an invitation to Brazilian autonomy; its language and its content were immediately recruited for the formulation of a national identity politically affirmed only five years later in the Declaration of Independence by the king’s son, Pedro I of Brazil. The “archaic” plainness that, according to Buarque de Holanda, is typical of Portuguese writing about the discoveries, became a sign of the letter’s objectivity; three centuries after being written, it was readable in contemporary terms; instead of Columbus’s islands of monsters and fables, it describes a mild and friendly world that pleases a more modern imagination and whose birds and plants are recognizable as an early, positively valued, desirable version of the new Brazil.

Just as the image of cannibals helps to confirm the justice of colonization, Caminha’s letter confirms the romantic patriotism of the first expressions of Brazilian national consciousness. The new nation seemed to like the idea of originating from a generous land and a people of childlike virtue and simplicity (and the letter also intersected with an early romantic positive valuation of the child). Caminha answered the need for a positively valued national difference with his delight in the strange, many-colored birds and in the friendly men, painted like checkerboards, something like a chess rook embedded in their lower lips. All he saw was healthy and clean, and the air, as Verrazzano also says, was sweet. The people, eating fruits and roots, accustomed to life in the fresh air, were stronger and more robust than the grain- and meat-eating Portuguese, and the new nation was pleased, for it wanted

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from the mouth of the Amazon to where the city of Santos is at present, including almost the entire coast of Brazil; unlike the first line, it gave the Portuguese a foothold in the New World. Papal approval of the new line came in January 1506, almost six years after the voyage of Pedro Alvares Cabral which officially “discovered” what became Brazil.

13 Jaime Cortesão published an edition of the letter in 1943.
better people, not just more wealth, than the former metropolis. The
women too were new in a positive way, showing their bodies with the
same innocence with which they showed their faces, described with a
curiosity and delight that at times seem to mirror their objects' unself-
consciousness; that curiosity and delight, so different from lust, colors
the reports of the sexual encounters between the Portuguese and the
original inhabitants of the land and allowed the new nation, in some
moods, to claim it arose from innocence. Not that the letter contradicts
accepted values of its own time. It shows no awareness that the women
it describes might live within a cultural economy marked by signs other
than European clothing or European shame. It never forgets the advan-
tages of Amerindian gentleness for the political, economic, and reli-
gious domination intended by Portugal. And in an ominous note,
sounded twice, it reports how eagerly the Indians helped to carry and
erect the cross with which the expedition imposed the double conquest
by king and church and muses that they were better friends to the
Portuguese than the Portuguese would be to them—a note of regret
that speaks well for Caminha but does not resonate in Brazil's first
formulation of a discourse of independence. It is the account of the
good waters and the friendly inhabitants, the promise of plenty, since
“the land is so good that, if you plant, anything will grow here,” the
prophecies of prosperity, which made the letter a useful document in
the creation of Brazil's new image of itself.

The initial suppression of Caminha's letter did not affect Portuguese
possession of Brazil, and the image of the colony as a pleasant place
was constructed in other documents too, but texts could be kept from
circulation for weightier political and ideological reasons than the auto-
matic secretiveness of an Iberian crown. Rolena Adorno notes that José
de Acosta's descriptions of native Mexican culture were accepted and
diffused, but Bernardino de Sahagún's were suppressed—at first by the
Inquisition—till the twentieth century. According to Adorno, though
both convey similar information, Acosta is careful to frame it—particu-
larly the descriptions of human sacrifice and cannibalism—in Christian
apologetics, using it to justify the conquest that put an end to such

David Haberly notes Caminha's use of the same word for “shame” and “genitals”
and claims that “pious zeal” and “a strong but repressed ... sexuality” coexist in
the letter. He also calls attention to another weighted element in the physical descrip-
tion of the people: Caminha stresses that the men are uncircumcised, which “he
took ... as fundamental proof that Brazil's inhabitants had not been sullied by
contact with the circumcised enemies of Iberian Catholicism, Moslems and Jews”
(Three Sad Races, p. 10).
barbarism. Sahagún, however, does not offer such guidance, leaving open a potentially subversive reassessment of European culture in contact with an internally coherent otherness.\textsuperscript{15} At present, in a new ideological climate, Sahagún is preferred, the absence of a frame around otherness being congenial to contemporary reassessments of the relation between Europe and the non-European cultures with which it came into such traumatic contact.

Historical vagaries, deliberate suppression, carelessness, lack of interest—all could keep serious texts out of the cultural repertoire, while opportunistic nonsense could enrich it with inaccuracies. A purported 1780 German translation of a Spanish document describing Portuguese America opens with an almost parodic discussion of whether the place names Maranjon and Grand Para refer to Señor Maranjon y Grand Para or to a Señor Maranjon and a Señor Grand Para and continues with equally ludicrous speculation about his, or their, adventures; it comes with a preface, annotations, and an exegetical essay and reminds us once again of the disorderly formation of a discourse of the Americas (Cudina, \textit{Beschreibung des portugiesischen Amerika}, p. 12).

But the disorder can also be political. Reports from the New World were part of the contentious politics of conquest and were pirated, intercepted, or corrupted as more or less competent informers acquired, understood, and transmitted them. David Quinn reprints intelligence reports from Portuguese archives, such as the letter from a Portuguese agent, intercepted by a Spanish agent, about Cartier's voyage. It reports accurately on Cartier's trip up the St. Lawrence and on Indians he took back to France with him, less accurately on the value of skins he acquired, fancifully on the fabulous animals he had seen; and it fabricates the news that Cartier had found natives living underground and brought back a ship full of gold.\textsuperscript{16} Such letters reveal more about the

\textsuperscript{15} Rolena Adorno, in "Literary Production and Suppression," discusses José de Acosta's books \textit{De procuranda indorum salute: Pacificación y colonización} and \textit{Historia natural y moral de las Indias}, comparing them to Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, \textit{Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España}. One should note, in the context of the confrontation between the European and a suspect otherness, that Sahagún also wrote admiringly about the Chinese; such tolerance might have made his description of Mexico unacceptable to Catholic authorities (cf. Scammell, p. 380).

\textsuperscript{16} The instance is a letter from Fernando Lagarto to King João III, from St. Malo, where the Cartier expeditions originated, reprinted in Henry Percival Biggar's compilation \textit{A Collection of Documents relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur de Roberval}, pp. 75–81, and kept in the Arquivo da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, corpo cronológico 3/14/37. See Quinn, 1:328. The letter from the Portuguese agent indignantly identifies Roberval as a marauder who is attempting to invade the lands of the king of Portugal (Quinn, 1:334).
economic and political rivalry among the three kingdoms they connect than about Cartier’s expedition. They document the misinformation that circulated about the new lands or even, in some cases, provide purposeful disinformation. Quinn notes that Ralph Lane’s account of his expedition is imprecise and possibly doctored so that Spain would not learn the location of the colony, settlers would not learn about the dangers of settlement, and Walter Raleigh, to whom the letter is formally addressed, would not learn of Lane’s mismanagement (3:295).

National interests impelling colonization also color the accounts. Those of the Portuguese and the Spanish aim to confirm possession; those of the French dispute it. A French attempt to found a colony in Brazil challenged the Iberian and Catholic monopoly over the New World, at least in Villegagnon’s initial intention to create a place of religious freedom, where Huguenots could live in peace, profit themselves and the crown, and stop making and attracting trouble in France. Villegagnon planned to enlist tribes inimical to the Portuguese (identified for Brazilian schoolchildren as brutal savages) in a region he saw as “inhabited by some Portuguese, and by a nation at war to the death against them, with whom we have an alliance.” He was optimistic, for the Indian nations “indicated, in their language, that we were welcome, offering us their goods, lighting joyous fires, for we had come to defend them against the Portuguese and other mortal and capital enemies of theirs” (Villegagnon, pp. 17, 18). The resistance against the French invasion is an important episode in the story of the formation of a Brazilian (and Portuguese-speaking) nation, but what mattered to Villegagnon were the political and economic rivalry between France and the Iberian nations played out in the southern part of the New World and the religious rivalries within France. He saw Amerindians, independent actors in the Brazilian narrative, as pawns in European games. He cared neither for the land nor for its inhabitants in themselves.

Villegagnon’s colony in Rio de Janeiro fell to internal dissension18 and

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17 See Jean de Léry, Viagem à terra do Brasil. Paul Gaffarel’s is the recommended French edition; the Brazilian edition is translated and annotated by Sérgio Millet, and includes a bibliography from Gaffarel as well as Plínio Ayrosa’s “Colloquium in the Brazilian language and notes on Tupy,” with information on language apparently provided by Léry himself. Villegagnon was in direct contact with Calvin, through whom Léry became interested in traveling to the planned new French colony; in chapter 6, Léry describes Villegagnon as initially sympathetic to reformed worship and ideas, but later as “tilting” toward Catholicism (pp. 94–102). In any case, this was a rare expedition including people of both persuasions.

18 Léry accuses Villegagnon of treachery and ill will; between the lines one reads of a man who may prefer arguing about religion to believing in it and who seems...
to the fortunes of another of the many wars among the English, the French, and the Spanish in North America, the Portuguese, the Spanish, the French, and the Dutch in South America. These rivalries gave rise to another class of texts, to propaganda less concerned with the difference between Amerindian and European than between various colonial powers: between the two Iberian nations, between Catholics and Protestants, and parenthetically, between different Amerindian tribes as potential allies or enemies of contending Europeans. Cristóbal de Acuña's history of the Spanish exploration of the Amazon region, culminating with the expedition of 1639, expresses the usual hopes for gold and precious stones, while sniping persistently at Spain's competitors. The area is rich enough, says Acuña, to profit whoever would investigate its fish and plants, but it also has gold in deposits surely richer than Potosí, much gold at the Putumayo River, and the "immense treasure that the Majesty of God has in keeping, to enrich that of our great King and Lord Phillip IV" (Descubrimiento del Amazonas, pp. 40, 51, 74, 52). Sadly, though, the vile Portuguese enslave "los pobrecitos indios" (the poor little Indians); they plant crosses in all villages, and if these are damaged, they abduct the inhabitants; Acuña himself, not being Portuguese and wanting to prevent idol worship of the crosses, refuses to plant any (p. 58). For Acuña, the difference between conquerors was more important than their common religion. Yet religion transformed the fruit of conquest from American soul into Spanish gold; the misdeeds of the Portuguese became simply a shifting mechanism.

Reports were also written and published to foster national policies. Gandavo's treatises are neither militaristic nor religious. Part memoir and part propaganda, they aim to garner settlers for the new colony, so the king will profit, and the land will be safe from his Spanish, French, or Dutch rivals. Thus, unlike Columbus or even Caminha, Gandavo does not promise quick riches or speak of gold—he mentions mineral wealth only in the last chapter of the História—but praises the

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19 See Gaspar Barleu (or Caspar Barlaeus, or Caspar Baerle), História dos feitos recentemente praticados durante oito anos no Brasil. The Dutch humanist and historian of Count Maurice of Nassau's governorship of the Dutch West India Trading Company colony in northern Brazil is much concerned with the religious competition for the souls of the neighboring Amerindians and with religious rivalries between the Dutch and the Portuguese. The University of São Paulo Press has published a facsimile of the classic Brazilian edition (Ministério da Educação, 1940), with translation and notes by Cláudio Brandão. Barleu's History was first published, in Latin, at Amsterdam in 1647.
mild climate, the fertile land, the sweet exotic fruits, the abundant game and fish, the pure waters, and the healing flora of the colony. The riches he promises are pastoral and bucolic, and the ideal behind them is neither golden Eldorado nor the orderly and clean trade center of Bernal Díaz's Tenochtitlán in Mexico; he foresees a prosperous and virtuous polity, where the poor will not come "begging at the door as in this kingdom here" (p. 94). Gandavo's New World is rich in cultivated land rather than in gold.

Similarly, Thomas Harriot's book of 1587, apparently written to attract settlers to Virginia, taken up by Richard Hakluyt and then by Théodore de Bry, and circulating widely in English, German, Latin, and French (Quinn, 3:139), deals almost entirely with the animal and vegetable

Gandavo does not forget the religious purpose of colonization; he describes the Indians as lacking religion or laws (though observing also that women are faithful to their husbands and that the Amerindians "live justly and in accordance with the law of nature" [p. 128]), and he promises conversions in addition to happiness, health, and prolonged youth.

And when we saw all those cities and villages built in the water, and other great towns on dry land, and that straight and level causeway leading to Mexico, we were astounded," or "We were astounded at the great number of people and the quantities of merchandise, and at the orderliness and good arrangements that prevailed, for we had never seen such a thing before" (Díaz, Conquest, pp. 214, 232).

The comment is pointed. Henry Kamen notes that "no century had been so conscious of the poor as the sixteenth. Commentators agreed that the number of poor and the problem of poverty were both of unprecedented size. In Rome, Sixtus V in 1587 complained of vagrants who 'fill with their groans and cries not only public places and private houses but the churches themselves; they provoke alarms and incidents; they roam like brute beasts with no other care than the search for food,'" (p. 167). The early seventeenth century saw significant changes in the administrative response to poverty, with the creation of hospitals and other institutions to care for the poor and sick—or, according to Foucault, to control them. Foucault dramatically connects forms of control imposed—beginning in the seventeenth century—on the sick, the poor, the young, the mad, in the chapter "Panopticism" of Discipline and Punish, pp. 195–228.

Gandavo makes clear that this prosperity is made possible by slavery, and, as is common, accepts African slavery quite casually: "Anyone who, after arriving in the land, manages to acquire two pair [of slaves], or a half dozen (even if he owns nothing else), soon has the means to support his family in an honorable way" (História, p. 93). Missionaries vigorously opposed colonists' enslavement of Amerindians, whom they wanted to gather in their own "missions." Africans were beyond the reach and definition of such missionary projects. Several missions were able for a while to shield Amerindians from the colonists, who actually benefited from this opposition since these settlements supplied them with the food that their extractive export economy discouraged them from cultivating (see Abreu, pp. 95–96, 144, 207). The juxtaposition of missionary activities and Gandavo's invitation is one more of the ideological disjunctions upon which much historically significant action rests: not all who are attracted by the description of a bucolic idyll will be content with the material rewards it can actually offer.
kingdoms. Harriot promises a wealth of spontaneously growing “mer-
chandisable commodities”—for example flax and hemp, 3:141)—as well
as plentiful medicinal plants, dyes, and wood, especially hardwood for
shipbuilding, sorely needed then in England (3:143, 149), and rich,
easy harvests of tobacco and sugarcane (3:143, 145); he also promises
abundant fish and game, maize, beans, edible roots, and European
grains (3:144–48). When he finally mentions mineral wealth, gold is
notably absent from his catalog of alum, nitrum (niter), and copper
(3:142–43). The resident population, he writes reassuringly, is harmless
and unarmed, living in ill-defended towns, friendly, disposed to love,
and amenable to conversion to the true religion (3:150, 151).

The reports I have mentioned so far stress the physical characteristics
of the new lands, suitable for exploitation or cultivation, easy to reach
or live in, rich, and empty. Yet, without a sense of contradicting their
description of an empty land, these and other reports also provide
divergent information about its original inhabitants. Some of the diver-
gence is part of the propaganda one would expect to issue from military
alliances between certain tribes and the European powers disputing the
new territories. Jean de Léry, for instance, speaks sympathetically of
those he calls “our” Tupiniquins, even though he remembers at times
that they are heathens and cannibals (he writes of witnessing cannibal-
ism; the nineteenth-century editor Paul Gaffarel collated his reports
with Hans Staden’s). “Their” (Portuguese) Tupinambás, however, are
treacherous and bloodthirsty. Peter Hulme observes that the Spanish
to the Spanish (p. 72), but the two images
amed the peoples of the Caribbean not according to their tribal affiliation but by their “response” to the Spanish (p. 72), but the two images of Native Americans as “the guileless and the ferocious” (p. 42) also needed internal European rivalries to become established in European consciousness.24 Politically, Léry’s account classifies Native Americans according to disputes involving four, not two, contenders. Like the Spaniards, the French and the Portuguese entered what Hulme describes as a fluid situation with occasionally intense hostility between villages. The negative image of the Amerindian is thus an instance not

24 Michel de Certeau places Léry’s account at the origin of several cultural and discur-
sive developments: the history of history, ethnography, the view of the savage Other (“At the end of his journey . . . the Savage is invented”); he also sees it as filling out what in “a long medieval tradition of utopias and expectations . . . was already marked [as] the locus that the ‘noble savage’ would soon inhabit” (The Writing of History, pp. 213, 212). Reading Hulme together with de Certeau, one realizes once again that the creation of the complex image one recognizes as the New World was a cooperative European endeavor.
only of the power of discourse to define a resistless otherness but also of war propaganda that implicitly recognizes the separateness and freedom of the denigrated opponent.

Another source of information about Amerindians, documenting yet another form of their contact with Europeans, is the letters of Jesuit missionaries. They describe the customs and languages of many different Amerindian peoples in both North and South America, attempt to understand beliefs, are often the only remaining records of cultures disintegrated by contact with European settlers, conquerors, and diseases. Though generally addressed to the fathers’ superiors or companions, they were also at times, like the seventeenth-century Jesuit relations, aimed at a wider public and used as fund-raisers for missions. This vast documentation, despite its primary concern with the Christianization of Amerindians, became an important source of information and anecdotes about the American other. It also became one forum for a long, deep, and finally unresolved debate upon the justification of conquest and settlement. Like the travel accounts, individual letters reveal differences between the agents and the subjects of the conversion attempts. Recent studies argue that the contacts documented in the relations did not result in the simple imposition of one religion and one culture on another but in a complicated semiotic negotiation that, if it changed Amerindian cultures, also challenged the certainties of the missionaries.25

In the letters of the Jesuit José de Anchieta the challenge appears indirectly as occasional irritation with his charges; it takes another shape in the Tupi grammar with which he recorded and legitimated their language and in the plays and poems in which Portuguese, Spanish, and Tupi coexist equally in a hybrid form that makes him (for some scholars) the founder of Brazilian literature.26 Anchieta documents the

25 In “Toward a Semiotics of Manipulation” Paul Perron argues that learning the Hurons’ language affected the missionaries’ ability to teach them orthodox Christianity; as an example, he discusses the difficulty of explaining the Trinity in a language in which the concepts of father and son make no sense on their own, for every father has to be the particular father of a particular child, and “relative nouns’ always take on the meaning of one of the three possessive pronouns” (p. 152). Perron also touches on the problem of disease in cultural analysis, noting that missionary work suffered when the Hurons associated baptism with death from European disease. Disease was probably the most powerful European weapon in the American continent, but it does not fit easily into a morally oriented tale of the conquest. Significantly, Tzvetan Todorov hardly mentions it in La conquête de l’Amérique.

26 For an edition of Anchieta’s poems and plays in Portuguese, Spanish, Latin, and Tupi (the last translated into Portuguese), see José de Anchieta, Poesias. For the argument on Anchieta’s role in the formation of Brazilian literature, see Antônio Cândido,
conflict between the secular colonists, who wanted Indian slaves, and the Jesuits, who wanted subjects for their theocratic society, in the colonists' idiom of ambition, pleasing with the king to curb the colonists, who snatch his devout and submissive converts into forced labor, killing the Christians and scaring away the pagans (Província do Brasil, pp. 37, 39, 33). Anchieta's hope that "there should come the law . . . , that they should not be captives, and neither should anyone be able to brand or to sell them" (p. 43) marks one of the breaches and cross alliances within the forces of colonization, whose congruence was also contingent. Such contingency is a necessary but seldom noted part of the discourse of American identity, which could arise in some of these fissures of the metropolitan project.

José de Anchieta's discourse is paradigmatic in being mixed, opening a field for the operation of difference. He opposes the secular colonizers and applies their language of ambition to the garnering of souls. Yet he compares the grammar of Amerindian languages to that of Greek and sees Amerindian eloquence as parallel to that of the Romans (Província, p. 40); his remarks are echoed in later attempts to provide an American past for the new American nations by assimilating Indians to the ancients and finding in the Americas an earlier, correctable model of European history. Without adverse judgment Anchieta describes Amerindians who dressed up in nothing but a hat, a pair of shoes, or a shirt (p. 30), separating elements of European culture from codes of class, gender, or morality. As instances like that naked, painted Indian in a hat accumulated, the connections between the elements of culture
ceased to be taken for granted; their recontextualization became an essential tool for the new American nations’ claims to cultural independence.

Anchieta had to try to transform “demon”-worshiping Indians—morally—into Europeans, but he recognized them as possessed of their own coherent culture. In documenting this culture, he was seeking an entry for the spread of Christianity; nevertheless his efforts produced the kind of hybrid artifact that came to exemplify the desired characteristic of an independent Brazilian culture. His plays, with their mixture of languages, and his preaching of Christian concepts in Indian languages are cultural composites. His work is a witness to conflict among Europeans and respect for, if not acceptance of, autochthonous cultures, and it records complex patterns of contact. Even if some of his letters seem hostile toward some of his charges, Anchieta was later read and taught as an early codifier of a hybrid Brazilian civilization.

The “Cartas” of Manuel da Nóbrega, Anchieta’s predecessor as provincial of Brazil, use the language of political and economic conquest for spiritual matters. The souls available in the new land for the church are a more accessible and valuable treasure than all the gold and dye wood desired by king or colonizer. The congruence between the language of economic exploitation and that of religious conversion addresses an ideological disjunction among the colonizers: the missionaries oppose both the bishop, representative of the secular church, and the settlers. Bishops and missionaries dispute spiritual authority over the colonies and tailor their strategies to their constituencies. The bishops almost condone unregulated consort with Indian women; the missionaries denounce it. They offer a buffer between Europeans and Amerindians which does not interest the bishops. This triangular argument, though conducted in terms justifying conquest, opens the possibility of criticism.

But among Jesuits, too, there were differences. Father Pierre Biard, in his “Relation of 1611” shows a bemused curiosity about his territory and its inhabitants and a good-humored acceptance of their oddities and even the hardships he endures. Though cold and hungry, he says, he and his brethren are seldom sick, probably because of the healthful air and waters of the Americas; he is sensible on the topic of American abundance, pointing out that it is useless from a commercial point of view because of difficulties in transportation; most important, he tries to see himself and his fellow Frenchmen as those he calls “our Savages” see him and is quite ready to consider their mockery of the physical
deformities of the French a corrective against excessive self-satisfaction. 28 In contrast, Father Charles Allemant is reduced to tautology in his disapproval of Canadians: “As for the habits of the Savages, it is enough to say that they are entirely savage.” He sees the inhabitants as greedy, mercenary, and dirty and recognizes only misguided pride where others had seen dignity. 29 His is also the first account in the Relations des Jésuites of torture and cannibalism practiced by Amer­
indians against their prisoners (p. 8). 30 Other letters and relations cor­
roborate both the more benign and the more gruesome views of the inhabitants of the wilderness: any general view of the full collection must necessarily result from choices made according to the reader’s as well as the Jesuits’ interests.

One can also find in the Jesuits’ accounts early examples of the use of alien custom to criticize European civilization. Father Jean de Brébeuf thinks that if, like the Hurons, Europeans had to transfer their dead from temporary winter burials to permanent cemeteries, they would be less likely to forget their mortality. 31 Such observations make it possible to conceive of European self and American other as aggregates of characteristics that can be freely modified and transplanted, possessed of beliefs that can be reformulated and adapted to new circumstances. Neither rigid nor infinitely modifiable (the limits of change trouble the writers studied by Paul Perron), self and other can accommodate re­
readings as they cross and recross the Atlantic and as moral, political, economic discourses on both of its shores contribute personal, social, historical, or ideological twists to their definition.

Territorial disputes between the Spanish and the Portuguese and be­
tween the Iberian nations and the French, English, and Dutch; be­
tween missionaries and colonists; between missionaries and the secular clergy; among Amerindians whose interests became entangled with those of the conquering Europeans; among individuals with different

29 Father Charles l’Allemant, letters to Father Hiérome l’Allemant, his brother, 1626, Relations des Jésuites, 1:3.
30 Descriptions of cannibalism were a staple in accounts of South American Amer­
indians. Léry gives a graphic but detached account (chap. 15), for which Milliet reprints Gaffare's annotations, with corroborative references to Gandavo, História; Ulrich Schmidel, Voyages curieux; André Thévet, Cosmographie universelle, Joseph Fran­
çois Lafitau, Moeurs des sauvages américains; and Hans Staden, Wahrhaftige Historie.
31 Material like this from the “Relation de ce qui s’est passé dans le pays des Hurons en l’année 1636,” from Jean de Brebeuf to Paul Le Jeune, superior of the Jesuit mission in New France (p. 133) appears, as we shall see, in Chateaubriand’s musings on history and mortality in the Americas.
visions of the Americas and how they should be approached were the perceptible signs of such twists. So were the activities of expedition organizers looking for investors; missionary houses looking for novices, donations, or leeway from the Vatican; geographers and navigators looking for information. Along an axis of political action, all these goals and interests coalesced into conquest and settlement but did not necessarily become congruent with ideas about European self or American other; a reservoir of ideas always remains available to be drawn upon for any necessary shifts in direction or action.

The awareness of difference is set off by a desire for coherence, evident in the cross-referencing that took place as authors of new accounts refuted the previous literature of exploration or used it to legitimate their own observations and as readers collated or confused them. Thus Cartier compares Canadian and Brazilian Amerindians—they all plant corn (1:315) and live with everything in common (1:318)—extending the themes of abundance and community to the Americas in general and helping to create a generic American otherness. Highlighting common elements mitigates the operation of chance and error, the conflicts of powers and interests within and among the conquering nations. It becomes possible to find a discourse of colonization among cultural differences and tensions in the worlds of both colonizers and colonized.

Once again the eccentric position of Portugal in Europe offers a different perspective on the discourse of conquest. Without contesting Buarque de Holanda's analysis of Portuguese language and culture as archaizing or medieval, Raymundo Faoro argues that Portugal's development of a centralized government and a mercantile economy in advance of the rest of Europe created a disjunction between language and politics reflected in its administrative relationship with its colonies. The disjunction appears in the contrast between the long Portuguese indifference to its American colony, where it implanted feudal fiefdoms, and its interest in the East Indian trade, which then seemed the safest bet for the future, since it was so clearly continuous with the past business of medieval and early modern Europe. Thus also the elegiac tone of

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32 See Faoro, Os donos do poder, esp. chaps. 1 and 2. Chaunu makes a much stronger argument for the importance of the margin: for him the entire "maritime adventure" of discovery and conquest was, for a long time, an "affair of the margin, a germination on the borders" (p. 65).

33 See A. J. R. Russell-Wood, "Preconditions and Precipitants," esp. p. 7. One can note that many of the first trading posts in Portugal's American colony were established by new Christians, possibly as a compromise between expulsion and subjection and perhaps an indication of official indifference to these new lands.
Luis de Camões’s *Lusiad* seems to regret rather than glorify the discoveries, as marking the end of a period of advancement. Thus also, though interests clashed in Brazil as in other parts of the Americas, the conflicts produced a variant reaction to American otherness in the repertoire of representations of the New World. Illustrating the discourse of colonization by a power that was politically and economically peripheral to European history acting in a land that remains on the periphery of world powers, the accounts of Portuguese colonization both confirm and fragment the universality of that discourse.

One last factor contributing to fragmentation and indeterminacy is seldom taken into consideration: personal idiosyncrasies affect not only the tales of voyages but also the actions undertaken. It is an uncomfortably random factor and might suggest that even the modern view condemning expansion and making of conquest a tale of culturally rather than divinely determined fatality simply reverses Sir Francis Drake’s smug opinion that the “Inglishe God” was showing a preference for the conquerors with the epidemic they had sown among the “wilde people” (Quinn, 2:306). In all, it becomes clear that the story of conquest and settlement was not the work of a monolithic Western or European or even a more parochial English or Spanish control of discourse or events. One need only read one after another the contradictory mixture of fact, fancy, and mysticism in Columbus’s letters; the pettiness and lack of imagination of Frobisher; the precise, supercilious, but interested and alert urbanity of Jacques Cartier, who assumes his interlocutors have their own agenda and who finds the political where Columbus sees the fabulous and Frobisher the monstrous.

Cartier and Frobisher had different interests and sponsors; they landed in different spots and dealt with different populations; but these factors do not fully explain the differences between their impressions. Frobisher’s is one of the most disagreeable accounts of the Americas. The Inuit he meets disgust him, and he immediately classifies them as “anthropophagi” for eating raw, unsalted, animal meat (Quinn, 4:212). Cartier’s account, by contrast, is larded with descriptions of abundant and delightful new foods—dozens of birds salted, smoked, roasted (Quinn 1:294), new fruits, new roots, and eventually new medicines for his men. Both Frobisher and Cartier sought treasure, but whereas

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34 In passing, and at the risk of engaging in national stereotyping, I will note that French reports brim with delight at new foods. Léry devotes whole sections to the wonderful fish of the Atlantic crossing and of the Brazilian coastal waters, thinks pineapples are the best thing he has ever tasted, and almost apologizes for not participating in a feast centering on human meat, or for not really appreciating the
Frobisher forces indications of gold from indifferent stones—just as he had forced indications of cannibalism from the inhabitants’ diet—Cartier learns Amerindian languages for use in commerce, even though at first he thinks little of his hosts, because they “own nothing of value” (Quinn, 1:295, 301) and seem unlikely trade partners.

In the interstices of these accounts there also emerges a response by the original inhabitants, who seem to be adopting the defensive technique of groups before a great danger (what Henry Louis Gates calls “signifying”) from negotiating with Cartier to fleeing from Frobisher. Even indirectly, the accounts show that the Americas did not suffer the imposition of European civilization passively, that otherness did not simply bow into oblivion. Different tribes signified that gold could be found inland, southward, northward, anywhere but where they were being asked about it. In Cartier’s difficulty at getting taken to Hochelaga one recognizes a defensive hospitality: his guides suggested indispensable side trips and visits till the season was too far advanced to complete the voyage. And it was not just one side that brought divinity into negotiation: Cartier reports that through messengers dressed as devils, his hosts’ gods instructed him to stay away from Hochelaga, but he responded in kind that through his priests Jesus conveyed approval of the plan.

Even Frobisher lets us see a—desperate—resistance, though he himself cannot understand it. He hates the people he encounters, despite their courtesy, and destroys their villages but is puzzled that they flee him or throw themselves to their deaths from a cliff at the sight of him; he takes a couple of women and is puzzled that their companions are upset; his men examine the feet of the older women for cloven hooves and, unable to prove them witches, decide they must be anthropophagi (4:222). Like other explorers, Frobisher took back to London a man and a woman to exhibit. The man went deaf and died, having unreasonably refused to be bled when sick; the postmortem determined that he also had a perforated lung and a concussion. The woman died too after the man’s funeral, where she was shown his body placed in a hole in fermented drink of his hosts. Certeau, forgetting Frobisher, says that pleasure is a remainder of the encounter with the other, which cannot be recovered or transmitted, which exceeds the writing (Writing of History, p. 220).

See Gates, “The Blackness of Blackness.”

One should note that Frobisher’s bile is not directed only against the Eskimos his and their misfortune brings together: on the way out he stops in the Orkneys, and has little good to say of its people, who “live in huts with their cattle,” “dresse their meate very filthily,” and follow the Reformed religion (4:208).
the ground and not eaten, the English not being cannibals as she might have feared, in case she was one herself (Quinn, 4:212–18). Frobisher is oblivious to the cruelty of his tale, but we are not, and by misreading him, we hear a dialogue where he heard only silence. Frobisher's consistent obtuseness almost forces a judgment on his actions triggering what one could call a "Dowell effect," after the narrator of Ford Madox Ford's Good Soldier—that skeptical, ironic reading of historical documents which, as denizens of our time, we learned from all the pointedly unreliable narrators of late realistic or early modernist fiction.

Frobisher's report, one of the first on North America to circulate widely in Europe, sounds a single negative note on the New World; Cartier's is subtler and feeds more complex notions of American difference. What he observes of Amerindian economic activity would eventually require a revision of such basic notions as property and profit; they live with everything in common (Quinn, 1:301) and, in Gabriel Archer's words from the Virginia colony, have "no respect of profit, neither is there scarce that we call meum at tuum among them" (Quinn, 5:275). On such astonished remarks about a fundamental difference in social and economic organization other writings build a picture of prelapsarian American innocence, which, however, is not developed to its most logical consequence; this truly different view of property leads their hosts, in Archer's terse note, to "steal everything" (Quinn, 5:275) and makes Cartier complain that they are "wonderful thieves, and steal everything they can carry off" (5:301). The American peoples, then, can be admired as living examples of Edenic innocence and biblical hospitality or punished as thieves. In either case they challenge basic assumptions upon which European society is built; they could be called upon when these assumptions were later challenged from within.

Different interests and interpretive structures led to different explanations and evaluations of Amerindians' relations to objects or property,

37 This Amerindian view of property—it could be called the lack of such a view—is still used to mark the difference between a natural innocence and the corruption of civilization as understood under the European or Euro-American definition. Wai- chee Dimock discusses later uses of these differences in the definition of the relation of goods and people: invoking Locke's notions of the connections among individualism, labor, and property, the new North American nation declared that Indians had no right to their lands; they did not "own" them according to the proper definition; furthermore, that difference made them into barbarians (Empire for Liberty, pp. 33–36). In Mad Maria, the Brazilian novelist Márcio Souza introduces an Indian who "steals" because he simply does not understand the distinction between meum and tuum. There are dire consequences that serve as severe criticism of a culture that does not understand and cannot imagine the benefits of not knowing such a distinction.
even within the same texts. Even more clearly than individual texts, the aggregate of accounts of the New World constitutes a catalog, without necessary synthesis, of a necessary cultural incoherence in readers and writers for whom consistent and coherent explanatory schemes might become an impediment to action or even to understanding. The incoherence can also show that the unity of the conquering culture is another projection of desire, not the result of observation. Although there is justification for identifying what is called Western or European culture, Portugal, Spain, England, France, and Holland each had its own particular America and its own enterprise of conquest, as did Protestantism and Catholicism. Each could be in turn self or other, for self and other are not only concepts in opposition but also "shifters," whose meanings necessarily change with context. Todorov's seemingly universal ethical matrix—"my main interest is . . . that . . . of a moralist" (Conquête, p. 12)—is in fact culturally based, for it regularizes the other so the self can be consistent, once again placing American innocence in the service of European conscience.

These inconsistencies indicate that the triumphal reading of the encounter was contested almost from the start. The view that America fell victim to the misdirected, dishonest, inhumane, and destructive energies of conquering Europeans appeared early, and is present as a solemn obligato even in the most optimistic readings of European expansion and Amerindian collapse. In the different tellings and readings it is possible to trace how generations of accounts began to merge into fiction, how they could anchor Rousseau's theories in fact or could supply later fictions of nationality. As we regularize the accounts, we should remember that readers were so open to fantastic possibilities that Gulliver's adventures had to be almost outrageous if Jonathan Swift was to convey that his book was meant to be satirical, not informational. And we can be wary of Todorov, who, though sensitive to the idiosyncrasies of Columbus's letters, writes as if they were the model of reports of the New World and a seed of the subsequent relation between Old and New, rather than part of a repertoire of images and ideas.

38 Todorov begins by stating that he will tell "une histoire exemplaire," an exemplary story, which "never forgets what the interpreters of the Bible called the tropological, or moral, sense" (Conquête, p. 12).

39 Patricia Hernlund has shown that Swift used contemporary speculation and knowledge of the world to make geographically correct satirical points, locating his imaginary countries on contemporary maps in accordance with contemporary cosmology, which he was both using and mocking ("The Maps in Gulliver's Travels").
In effect, if the discourse of otherness is a construction, then, though one cannot assume it to be either consistent or reliably accurate, one can see it as a privileged example of how such construction might work. It can be expected then that “Americans” will appear in contradictory terms, as innocent and cunning, as monstrous cannibals and childlike hosts, as shiftless nomads and prudent cultivators of the food that permitted the visitors to winter over across the Atlantic—the contradictions expressed sometimes in the same sentence, as in Gabriel Archer’s information that Indians “are naturally given to treachery, however we could not finde it in our travell up the river, but rather a most kind and loving people,” and that “they are a very witty and ingenious people, apt both to understand and speake our language” (Quinn, 5:276). More commonly, like Columbus, the commentators mix spontaneous and coded reactions: “They are all of good build. They are a very handsome people: the hair is not curly, but straight and thick, like the mane of horses, and all have wider faces and features than any generation I have seen so far, with beautiful, not small eyes” (11 October 1942)—ready for time- and interest-bound interpretation. The first ill-favored man Columbus sees becomes involved in an incident in which the Spanish wound some “Indians,” beginning a series of references to homely “Caribs” or anthropophagi (13 January 1492). Only later would this dichotomizing of the inhabitants of the New World be normalized.

Such normalization can also obey something like market forces. As Percy Adams notes, public demand encouraged a supply of fables: the giant Patagonians inspired by Antonio Pigafetta became staples in the literature if not in Patagonia (Travelers and Travel Liars, pp. 21–29). Some of this fantasizing could simply be due to imaginative exuberance, but some was more specifically political. Robert Berkhofer notes that the Dutch publishing house of De Bry favored the gorier accounts of the New World, for stories about Spanish atrocities toward savage cannibals fed Holland’s enmity against Spain and Catholicism and supported its

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40 Hulme uses the same letter to argue that such documents do not aim at coherence or respect what is usually termed evidence (p. 47).

41 The reference to straight hair is coded, and repeated in several other accounts, to indicate the difference between the populations of the Americas and those of Africa. This coding is a pivot for their differential treatment: the enslavement of Africans was common enough at the time to have been specifically sanctioned by the Catholic church through Pope Nicholas V, in an agreement signed in 1454 with the Portuguese crown by which the papacy received commissions on the receipts of the existing traffic in Africans, but Indians had not yet been classified in the master-slave structure and were, in fact, consistently difficult to subject to it. (See Julio José Chiavenato, O Negro no Brasil, p. 112.)
attacks on Spanish ships and territories (chap. 1). In general, Northern Europe preferred the more sensational tales of warfare and cannibalism, such as the *Wahrhaftige Historie* of Hans Staden. Its public was not directly involved in colonization or with the moral and economic problems confronting the French, the English, the Spanish, and the Portuguese. The colonizing countries produces not only the kinds of reports necessary to prepare and send out colonists and to convey what to expect of the venture but also discussions of the humanity of the newly found peoples, necessary for deciding whether they would be treated as slaves or coadjutors, whether they would be separated into reservations or employed, if that is the proper term, in the new plantations, whether they would be guides to be cultivated or enemies to be exterminated.

The genre of Hans Staden's *Wahrhaftige Historie* came to underlie a negative, Hobbesian view of the populations of the Americas and, by extension, of humanity at its origins. Conversely, reports of hospitable, generous innocent Amerindians, unspoiled by civilization as understood in Europe, were used by other theorists to postulate an originally gentle humanity. Locke says that "in the beginning all the World was America," integrating the Americas into a European discourse of origin and showing the completion of the process by which, as Berkhofer says, the "Indian . . . moved from the contrasting descriptions of explorers and settlers to the ideological polemics of social philosophers."42 Thus the tales of explorers roasted by giant American cannibals fed a taste for the sensational and a propaganda campaign embedded in European politics and economics while also buttressing the political, cultural, and economic power of those whose view of the other as savage provided a convenient embodiment of the negative components of the European self or justified European atrocities in America.43 When Roberto Fernández Retamar embraced Caliban/cannibal as the incarnation of an American (more specifically, a Latin-American) self opposed to and redemptive of European history (which includes the United States and excludes Eastern Europe), he once again appropriated otherness, this

42 Berkhofer (p. 22) quotes Locke from the *Two Treatises*, p. 319.
43 This is part of the argument of Michael Palencia-Roth, for whom the image of the Amerindian as cannibal predominates in the European iconography of the Americas. See "Cannibalism and the New Man," pp. 2, 5, 15–19.
time to defend a Cuban revolution in search of a newly redemptive autochthonous primitive. 44

In the end, the differences and incoherencies in and among accounts of the New World are not reducible to regular patterns of interpretation. The only thing Todorov’s view of their characteristically destructive European arrogance has in common with Germán Arciniegas’s sense that they brought about an explosion of knowledge and an opening of ethical and epistemological vistas in Europe is the implication that voyages and accounts had a destabilizing epistemological effect on established world views. Certeau says that the image of America in which “the other returns to the same,” reassembled with elements of the self, also established a break, marked by the Atlantic, between the “over here” (though Certeau is over there) and the “over there” (though the Amerindians are over here) belonging to a “new world” (History, pp. 218–29). The break was then “transformed into a rift between nature and culture” essential for the elaboration of a new cultural identity. The game of identity and difference that characterizes this elaboration began as soon as it was possible to think that “nature is what is other, while man stays the same” (p. 220).

But that distinction is not stable either; it can be reelaborated in different ways. Explorers had practical reasons to bring back to Europe samples of savages, like specimens of the exotic flora and fauna (were the Amerindians curious too? Rousseau, as we shall see, says they were not): to court a sovereign, to prove the success of one expedition and solicit financing for the next, to show Amerindians the advantages of civilization and win their alliance for the work of conversion (see, for example, the Letter of Paul Le Jeune to Father Barthélémy Jacquinot, provincial of France, April 1632, Relations, 1:14). But otherness, like the self, does not define itself in isolation, and these “savages” often seemed to exist beyond familiar oppositions, such as, for example, those of religious beliefs. The scandal of such otherness is apparent in attempts to deny or regularize it: Rolena Adorno tells of the inquisitor of Granada, who, upon becoming archbishop of Lima in 1580, tried to govern Amerindians as he had governed the “morisco” (imperfectly Christianized Muslim) population of Spain and found that familiar dichotomies no longer worked. Neither did tips gleaned from de las Ca-

sas's catechization of Amerindians work to make new Christians of the Jews in Valencia ("La ciudad letrada," p. 5): knowledge was suddenly not transferable. In the end, the Americas prompted a review of the notions of origins and the relation between humanity and nature, but the revision soon became so thoroughly naturalized that it lost its own origins and its initial critical force.\(^{45}\)

Images of the New World became naturalized as they were used in a critique of European polities and culture. It is because the discourse of the first accounts is polyvocal that it could be woven along the centuries into a discourse of otherness with which, in the literary and intellectual movements of the eighteenth century, Europe rethought origin and history and the legitimacy of established forms of social, political, and economic organization. This streamlined discourse of the New World then became part of the discourse of American nationality at the time of the independence, recrossing the Atlantic to justify opposition to the metropoles and eventually to be integrated into the images of the new nations for internal and external consumption.

Normalizing the discourse of discovery and conquest involved choices, as did normalizing the "colonial discourse" that followed it when writing became rooted in the colonies, or normalizing the discourse of the independent nations originating from these colonies. This dialectic of opposition and emulation continues, as we see when Angel Rama defines a unified Latin America against the more powerful North American nation in ways reminiscent of those that had once defined it against powerful European metropoles; it is extended in the opposition he identifies between the literate center and the disempowered margins within Latin America (see A cidade das letras). Stressing the continued resistance to synthesis which allows differentiation, explication, and redifferentiation to continue as discursive power shifts, Rolena Adorno

\(^{45}\)In chapters 2, "The Prose of the World," and 3, "Representing," of The Order of Things, Michel Foucault states that at the beginning of the seventeenth century a radical epistemological shift in European thought occurred, affecting the ideological structure of ordinary life and common assumptions and persisting to the present day. Before the shift, "nature, like the interplay of signs and resemblances, is closed in upon itself in conformity with the duplicated form of the cosmos" (p. 31). After the shift, nature extends itself, knowledge is based no longer on resemblance and contiguity but on origin. Could not the discovery of new forms of life on land that was not even supposed to exist have helped destabilize the earlier structures? Foucault does not mention the discoveries. In this omission at least his subversive discourse once again naturalizes the events of those two centuries and becomes continuous with Scammell's conservative denial of Europe's debt to the age of discovery and conquest.
asks her readers to remember that even in Rama's universe, "ideological harmony and unanimity characterize neither the sphere of the domi­nant society, nor that of the dominated one." Neither forms "one single ideological discourse; they are polyvocal" ("La ciudad letrada," p. 4). Normalization, then, identifies the operation of a discourse of power; differ­entiation identifies the claim to discursive power. Polyvocality and even incoherence open the field where discursive power can be reclaimed. It is also because the discourse of otherness is polyvocal that certain alliances are possible in apparent contradiction to the customary notions of the distribution of power between the conquerors and the con­quered. Thus, persecuted Amerindians look for support to the highest officials of the metropoles, up to the sovereign him- or herself (Adorno's Guaman Poma shows the Inca chronicler addressing Philip II of Spain over the heads of colonial authorities). The argument of these appeals is conducted in the discourse of the conqueror (often depicting local tyranny as detrimental to royal revenues), but it also attempts to fracture the discourse of power and turn it against itself. The subjugated other protests subjection within the discourse of domination, and on the conquerors' terms, asserting a separate self despite subjection. This contra­dictory movement appears in arguments for the congruence between Christianity and Amerindian beliefs to preserve them from destruction and for the incongruence between Christian action and belief. Christianity is contested in its own rhetoric, which is the best available means of communication with the seat of power (Adorno, Guaman Poma, p. 13).

The argument between Fredric Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad in the pages of Social Text is almost too pat an illustration of this relationship between a dominant discourse and discourses it would like to dominate more completely. Jameson uses one Chinese and one "African" text to characterize the literature of the Third World and the category of history to differentiate it from that of the First World. Turning Hegel on his head, he declares that the Third World has too much history, rather than not enough, that it is still mired in the political and the social, which the First has already left behind ("Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism"). Ahmad points out that "there is no such thing as a 'third-world literature' which can be constructed as an internally coherent subject of theoretical knowledge," that litera­tures commonly lumped together as Third World are all different, and that if there were such a literature, Western critics would know nothing about it because they don't know the languages ("Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness," pp. 4, 5). He almost says that the distinction resides not in the essential character of the Third World but in the power relation between reader and writer, noting that within the United States feminist and black writing can be just as allegorical as African writing or that Urdu literature, written for internal consumption by a sophisticated culture, can be nonalle­gorical (pp. 15, 18). Kwame Appiah's argument, in In My Father's House, that the term "Africa" has meaning only in a homogenizing discourse from outside the continent also asks for attention to difference.
Similarly, American claims for independence and recognition are often based on arguments developed in the metropoles; attempts to define national identity through difference often resort to the repertory of characteristic traits made available in the early accounts of the Americas. There are limits to how much it is possible to manipulate those materials, but that it is possible at all should caution us against a nostalgia of essences and against metaphors of depth and remind us that resistance, difference, and criticism can be planted in the very discourse of conquest.

For centuries the New World validated theories of European progress and provided terms for criticizing European institutions. It verified theories of history which maintained it lacked history. It gave rise to new populations for which it was devalued. But by stressing difference, the new nations reminded Europe of its doubts about its own legitimacy. Theories of American primitivism and backwardness argued American innocence, European exhaustion, and a historically necessary transfer of power from Europe to America.\(^47\) The evolutionary interpretation of history which declared a pure European population superior to the mixture of races and peoples in the New World also implied a new humanity that would revitalize a depleted European stock. The absence of writing led to an investment in education and a revaluation of literacy which allowed Americans to claim civic maturity and the right to political emancipation.\(^48\)

In the end, the image of the New World constructed from the accounts of the first travelers and explorers falls into the "complex order" that Fernand Braudel finds "at the very deepest levels of material life," with its "strange collections of commodities, symbols, illusions, phantasm and intellectual schemas," which constitute civilization and to which civilizations contribute (\textit{Structures of Everyday Life} 1:333). As "strange collections" rather than determined structures, these schemas can shift allegiances and change their meanings as they tumble about in the current of history.

\(^47\) This is what Robert Weibsuch identifies as the opposition between European "lateness" and American "earliness."

\(^48\) In this matter it is interesting to read various missionaries' reports on young Indians' talent for Latin. Fray Toribio de Benavente o Motolinia, in \textit{Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España}, praises the great "ability" of the Indians, who could confound a newly arrived Spanish cleric by arguing a point in Latin, then cap it with an observation on Latin grammar (p. 390).