

# *Images of the Native in Renaissance Encounter Narratives*

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**I**F BY THE early eighteenth century Jonathan Swift could satirize the proliferation of travel literature, by the 1990s, especially in the wake of the commemoration of Columbus's first voyage, we might feel even more saturation, perhaps in particular regard to commentary about the European voyages and their records and narratives. Nor is Swift the first to offer resistance, ambivalence, and indignation in the face of European imperialism. In fact, the ambivalence, if not the reluctance, with which the monarchs of Europe, even Ferdinand and Isabella, received Columbus's enterprise of the Indies represents an opposition from within before the encounter with the other that de Certeau, Todorov, and Greenblatt discuss. During the encounter between the Spanish and Natives in 1492, this ambivalence about the American enterprise continues, even within the "Columbus" texts, and soon after a horror about its excesses occurs within Europe itself. In light of the Spanish contact with the indigenous peoples, Thomas More made his Utopians disdain the gold that the Spaniards so valued and that so motivated them to make war on and enslave the Natives. Bartolomé de Las Casas describes the Spanish abuse of the indigenous peoples and sides with the latter, saying that the Spaniards burned them alive and dashed the heads of their babies against rocks all for the greater glory of Christ and the 12 apostles (3: ch. 29; see also Sale 157, Todorov 139-41). It was difficult for Columbus to convince others to launch his project, and ever since the results of the encounter with America have been contested.<sup>1</sup>

Columbus as a subject or self, as a self-fashioning writer or person, becomes a difficult concept because he has been con-

structed, in ways that are not always clear, by others whom we cannot entirely establish or trust and by a society. Columbus as a site of contesting powers, as an interpretative venture or controversy, is something of which we can speak more readily. The reception of Columbus becomes even more important than it is for Shakespeare and others as his first and most important "text" is of more uncertain provenance and involves even more textual problems. Like Shakespeare, Columbus has been a cultural icon for centuries and has often been made to sing the imperial theme of European expansion, so that in this age of the global village and of apparent decolonization, the traditional European iconography of Shakespeare and Columbus has been called into question. Shakespeare's ambivalence is well known: Prospero and Caliban are complex characters in the history of Shakespearean criticism, that is, in the oscillation between aesthetic and political hermeneutics.<sup>2</sup> The ambivalence of Columbus's texts, his *Journal* and "Letter," however, is often forgotten or elided. He was a sailor, a practical man who made history as event and, to some unverifiable extent, history as story. History is both event and the discourse about event. There is myth in history and history in myth.

Experience and imagination become overlapping parts of the same whole, and therefore the question of the priority of mythology or ideology continues to nag at the historian, literary theorist, and philosopher alike. Columbus's *Journal* is a good example of the contested relation between narrative and argument. Its production and textual history show the tangle of story in dialectic. The *Journal* was supposed to be a description of what Columbus saw, a ship's log, but it has been used to tell a story and has been much argued over (Marden xv; see also Fuson, "*Diario*" 51-75, "Log" 8-11). Whether discourse structures material reality or the converse is probably impossible to say and is now a debate between materialism and constructivism as it once was between materialists and idealists. Whatever the first cause or provenance, the relation between material events and the representation of events in writing seems to be reciprocal. History as event and story are inextricably entwined.

Although my essay is most concerned with Columbus's "Letter," it takes a brief detour into the textual life of the *Journal* in

order to provide a context for the controversy about the Columbian canon. While I am not suggesting that we disintegrate Columbus as an author into his son Ferdinand or his friend Bartolomé de Las Casas—as this would be at its extremes as ill-advised as making Shakespeare into Francis Bacon, the Earl of Oxford, or his editors, Heminges and Condell—it is important to avoid a kind of literalism and naïveté that fashions Columbus into a modern author who is, apparently, master of his own intentions. In *Colonial Encounters* (1986) Peter Hulme gives a good summary of the difficult and uncertain transmission of Columbus's *Journal*:

the actual text . . . disappeared, along with its only known copy, in the middle of the sixteenth century. The only version we have . . . is a handwritten abstract made by Bartolomé de Las Casas, probably in 1552, and probably from the copy of Columbus's original then held in the monastery of San Pablo in Seville. There have subsequently been various transcriptions of Las Casas's manuscript.

(17; see also Fuson, "Log" 5-11)

The state of textual uncertainty in Columbus's *Journal* or *diario* leads David Henige into even more radical bibliographical scepticism. He says in *In Search Of Columbus* (1991) that

it became routine to treat the diario as if it were almost entirely an undefiled version of the shipboard log that Columbus presumably kept. It is true that one-fifth of the diario's text purports to be in Columbus's own words. It is also true that by the time Las Casas, in whose hand the diario is written, came into possession of whatever text he copied and paraphrased, it had undergone an unknown number of transmissions, with all the corruption this necessarily entails. To treat the diario as the product of Columbus is simply to banish caution and substitute for it a species of credulity that can have little hope of withstanding serious scrutiny. Little enough seems certain about the diario, but one thing that should be beyond cavil is that its principal author is not Christopher Columbus but Bartolomé de Las Casas, aided and abetted by Columbus and any number of intermediate scribes. (x)<sup>3</sup>

This kind of textual disintegration has been part of Biblical textual scholarship since the humanists and was especially strong in nineteenth-century Germany. The same kind of disintegration, multiplication, and splintering of the text has occurred in Shakespearean editing, most recently in the *Oxford Shakespeare*.

Although these textual questions are always worth pursuing, I think they are a means to an end and that we have to shift from conflating the author function with the historical individual. It is probably better to think also of "Shakespeare" or "Columbus" as collective productions, which depend on writing, editing, printing, and reception and not simply as ground-breaking individuals. The Romantic myth of the individual—of the great man—is still with us despite the great changes in thinking about class and self that have occurred since Marx and Freud and have intensified in conjunction with explorations of questions of race, class, and gender since the Second World War. Do we really need to name that author? Is that aspect of Carlyle, Nietzsche, and Shaw still with us? Great disputed texts, like the Bible, are received into culture, and while questions of authorship fascinate us and are not without significance, to negate a text because its authorship is uncertain or different constitutes a partial, if not misguided, move. The warnings about Columbus as author need to be considered and, if convincing, heeded, but the "Columbian" texts of which we speak should not be relegated to curious and unread works of doubtful authorship or apocrypha. Paradoxically, it may be that Columbus's texts become even more fascinating cultural documents, though viewed from a new vantage point, if the complexities of production, transmission, and reception are taken into consideration.

The main focus of this essay is the relation between world and text. It argues that the writing of Columbus, like Shakespeare's works and the Bible, is full of textual problems and that so much unacknowledged and unknowable editing and transmission have occurred in the texts that to speak of Columbus is to mention a cultural project as much as the man himself. In this sense, the texts of the encounter move beyond the intentions of the individual author and constitute a collective cultural production.

The mediation between the European observer and the Native he is representing becomes problematic. The historical document, such as the "Letter of Columbus," is like a fiction whereby the authority and intention of the author find their complication in the transmission and reception of the document. It is difficult

to say who is making Columbus speak in the "Letter," but out of shorthand we say Columbus, who is as much an embodiment of the Spanish collective enterprise of the Indies as the captain who convinced the monarchs to back his venture and set sail for the western Atlantic. Except for whatever historians have verified, Columbus's account of his voyages does not differ much from classical travel tales and dozens of other encounter narratives that Richard Hakluyt later brought together in the last decade or so of the sixteenth century. There are wonders, monsters, obstacles, abundant lands and plants and peoples whose local customs need elaborating. Columbus brought the myths of Pliny's natural history with him as much as the descriptions of exotic peoples in Herodotus's history. Discourse attempts to structure the material world; that is, the Spanish captain would like the new lands to be Marco Polo's Cathay, but Columbus also discovers that America is not Africa or Asia. To some extent, the desire that discourse is the world itself, a fantasy today among postmodern travellers to hyper-reality, takes hold of Columbus and his successors. The rhetoric of classical travel and historical writing is used as a means of promoting the new-found lands at court at home in Europe, but is also a block to understanding Natives and their environment. It may be that the very use of representing the present New World as if it were the China of the European past enabled Columbus and the Spaniards to take possession of those lands without having to come to terms with the rights of the inhabitants.

As we do not have many records of what the Natives of the Americas thought about Europeans in their encounter during the Renaissance (although an increasing number are coming to light), it is difficult to find a balanced view of the Natives. With such an imbalance in evidence, it is important to be as sceptical as possible about European representations of the indigenous peoples. It is also a historical and logical problem to speak about pure indigenous and European cultures and about originary reactions to their first encounters. First indigenous reactions are most often retrospective and involve translation into European languages or Christian idioms. First European reactions to the encounters with the indigenous peoples, though more plentiful,

rely on rumour, reports, and *ex post facto* reconstructions of Columbus's first contact, which itself is reconstructed. We do not have "pure" unmediated accounts of the encounter. By definition, any account of the other culture on either side before the encounter would be speculation and legend. (The Norse writings about expansion and attempts at colonization are a matter for another essay.) This essay attempts to find ambivalence and resistance within the European encounter narratives, concentrating on the "Letter of Columbus" and touching briefly on other texts such as Bernal Díaz's *The Conquest of New Spain* and William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647*, in order that we can understand the stresses within European culture itself as a result of the encounter and perhaps gain glimpses at possible resistances to stereotyping of the Natives among the Europeans (and, possibly, among the Natives themselves). The argument is meant to be suggestive and heuristic, a way of coming to terms with a small part of a vast array of documents in this important historical encounter.

The question of the European representation of the Native also relates to the Native representation of the European arrival in, and colonization of, America. One of the difficulties for pre-Conquest Native documents, as James Lockhart mentions in relation to the Nahuas of central Mexico, is that even the most informative among them were mostly redone under Spanish influence during the 1540s and after (330). The Europeans and their American settlers frequently wrote about the Natives from the vantage of conquest and triumph (Deloria 429-30). Gordon Brotherston has attempted to examine the European myth that the indigenous peoples had no writing: "when Europeans did encounter undeniable evidence of writing, of literacy equivalent to their own, they did their best to eradicate it, because it posed a threat to the Scripture (the Bible) they brought with them" (15). During the first three decades of the conquest (1492-1519), owing in part perhaps to the quick decimation of the Natives, there was no Native chronicler of the encounter. It was Bartolomé de Las Casas who rose to write a defence of the Native population (Brotherston 21). Las Casas also defended the Natives at Valladolid—where in 1550-51, King Charles of Spain

convened theologians and philosophers—against Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. The debate centred on whether the indigenous peoples were human beings with culture or brutes, as Aristotle defined them, who could become servants to the civilized nations. More generally, since the conquest or encounter in 1492, the Europeans had viewed the Natives from a theological perspective in which they were identified with the lost peoples of the New Testament or as brutes who originated in the “Americas” (Deloria 432-35). Las Casas insisted on a place for the indigenous peoples as members of a human civil society (Pagden 119).

But the represented also represent. Although Native images of the Europeans have not been widely disseminated, Brotherston describes a number of important cases, such as the annals of the Valley of Mexico (1516-25), a Tupi taunt of French missionaries in Brazil (1612), and an Algonkin account of Europeans entering North America (seventeenth century). These three examples represent but a small fraction of the Native texts that describe the encounter with the Europeans in the first two centuries of contact. The first instance involves an account of Cortés’s invasion of the Aztec empire that is copied from a screenfold that recorded the history of metropolitan Tenochtitlan from the twelfth to sixteenth centuries. The annal notes the presence of the Europeans (*popoloca*) in the calendar when they intervene directly in affairs of national importance. The Tupi taunt of the French missionaries involves a “carbet” or the form used by braves to jeer at rivals through examples of the braves’ own prowess. The account of Europeans arriving in the late sixteenth century on the mid-Atlantic shore of North America occurs near the end of the second part of the *Walum Olum* of the Lenape-Algonkin, which describes in chronicle form the list of successive Lenape *sachems* (chiefs) through a few centuries (Brotherston 28-32, 48-53). The representation of the Natives and their representation of the Europeans have left evidence only in the wake of Columbus’s encounter with the world of the western Atlantic. If only briefly, it is important to record this cultural meeting in representation, even if this essay focusses mainly on Columbus’s writings about this encounter and how these writings also represent a corporate or collective account subject to the vicissitudes of production and transmission in the early modern period.

Finding ambivalent and resistant voices in the documents surrounding Columbus's four voyages to America reminds us that these doubts and oppositions in the text involve all kinds of mediation. The image of the Native is translated as well as ventriloquized. Although much has been said about Columbus and his relation to indigenous peoples at first contact, we have no documents in his hand describing this momentous event. Instead, we possess Columbus's *Journal* and "Letter," which, in Cecil Jane's view, he did not compose.<sup>4</sup> It is possible that Columbus, who may have come to literacy late, could not write at this time, but Jane, who argues this position, has not found incontrovertible evidence to justify the claim. Whether Columbus even recorded the daily occurrences of the first voyage is based on the reports of Ferdinand Columbus and Las Casas, who were not with him on the voyage. This son and this friend are, in Jane's view, liable to idealize Columbus. Possibly, Columbus had a clerk record his thoughts in writing. Clerks and copyists often edited at this time, so that mistakes and misrepresentations of Columbus are possible, if not probable. The clerk might give to Columbus's words their literary form. When Columbus is speaking in these documents, who is actually speaking? (Jane xcvi-xcviii). The "Letter" is preserved in edited form and the extent of editing cannot be determined. Las Casas's *précis* of the *Journal* is not complete and it is difficult to know how vital the omissions are. It is possible that these mediations magnify the glory of the voyage and play down the disappointment it caused Columbus. The image of the Native in these voyages involves a high degree of mediation and textual uncertainty, so that when we say that "Columbus" said this or that about the Natives, it should be stated with much care and scepticism and even more than usual with a suspicion of the "author" as an individual agent.

Thus when we meet once again with the famous opening of what is said to be the "Letter of Columbus" ("Carta de Colón," written, it appears, to Luis de Sant' Angel), about the first voyage, it is difficult to know just what we are hearing and from whom. The letter proclaims:

SEÑOR, porque sé que avréis plazer de la gran vitoria que Nuestro Señor me ha dado en mi viaje, vos escribo esta, por la qual sabréys



como en .xxxiii. días pasé de las islas de Canaria á las Indias con la armada que los ilustrísimos rey é Reyna nuestros señores me dieron, donde yo fallé muy muchas islas pobladas con gente sin número; y d'ellas todas he tomado posesión por Sus Altezas con pregón y vadera real estendida, y no me fué contradicho. á la primera que yo fallé puse nombre "San Salvador," á conmemoración de Su Alta Magestad, el qual maravillosamente todo esto ha dado; los Indios la llaman "Guanahani." (Jane 3)<sup>5</sup>

SIR, As I know that you will be pleased at the great victory with which Our Lord has crowned my voyage, I write this to you, from which you will learn how in thirty-three days, I passed from the Canary Islands to the Indies with the fleet which the most illustrious king and queen, our sovereigns, gave to me. And there I found very many islands filled with people innumerable, and of them all I have taken possession of their highnesses, by proclamation made and with the royal standard unfurled, and no opposition was offered to me. To the first island which I found, I gave the name *San Salvador*, in remembrance of the Divine Majesty, Who has marvellously bestowed all this; the Indians call it "Guanahani." (Jane 2)

There is no original of this letter, which has been reconstructed from four Spanish versions as well as three Italian versions and one Latin version. The report of first contact between Columbus and the indigenous peoples is contained in a lost document. This situation is not unusual in the early modern period. After all, we have only a few signatures and perhaps some lines in Shakespeare's hand from the *Thomas More* fragment, but few Shakespearean scholars or editors would suggest this fact as evidence that there never had been originals and that Shakespeare never wrote his plays. Nevertheless, we have to entrust ourselves to intermediaries, to the Heminges and Condells, and hope that with materials as ideologically charged as Columbus's letter and, for that matter, all his writings, that the clerks, printers, historians, and others were not tempted, like those against whom Gulliver rails, to change the record. One small example that has been discovered might serve as a reminder that there may be more undiscovered instances of ideological editing. In the previous quotation the first Latin translation of the letter of Columbus does not mention the queen and credits only the king for having sent Columbus on his voyage. Did Leandro Costco, the translator, want to credit Columbus's "discovery" for Aragon alone, as Henry Harrisse suggested in 1872, or was it a printing

error or a sign of the inability of Castilians, no matter how loyal, to admit the equality of Isabella with Ferdinand, as Cecil Jane suggested in the early 1930s? Columbus's possession of the Natives, which had such devastating material consequences for the indigenous populations of the Americas, rests with the editors, whether they be clerks, scribes, notaries, civil servants, lawyers, historians, and others, because they have helped to make and reconstruct Columbus's writings and the Columbian legacy. The image of the Native at first contact as a possession becomes closely related to the question, "who is in possession of the text?" If Columbus is supposed to have met with no opposition from the Natives, as the letter says, we have to take his word for it or his word reconstructed through editors. Whether by accident or design, Columbus becomes a corporate enterprise based on the legal interests of Spain. The rules and laws of the Pope and the Spanish sovereigns do not consider those of the Natives. In this passage Spanish names, in the names of Christianity and Spanish secular power, replace the indigenous peoples' names.

The letter of Columbus records his great expectations. Columbus, as we have him here, clearly wants to find evidence of a great civilization to convince his sovereigns of the importance of his voyage and the wisdom of their investment:

*de adonde enbié dos hombres por la tierra, para saber si había rey ó grandes ciudades. andovieron tres jornadas, y hallaron infinitas poblaciones pequeñas y gente sin número, mas no cosa de regimiento; por lo qual se bolvieron.*

*Yo entendía harto de ostros Indios, que ya tenía tomados, como continuamente esta tierra era isla. (5)*

I sent two men inland to learn if there were a king or great cities. They travelled three days' journey and found an infinity of small hamlets and people without number, but nothing of importance. For this reason, they returned.

I understood sufficiently from other Indians, whom I had already taken, that this land was nothing but an island. (4)

For Columbus, the many Natives are in his possession, but they are not yet marvellous enough for his ambitions. The lands become the marvellous ("maravilla") while Columbus grows lyrical about its grandeur and, for the moment, seems to forget the people who inhabit it. In summary he proclaims "la Española es

maravilla" (7)—"Española is a marvel" (6). In his paean to this world that is new to him he has already introduced cattle and built towns and villages, partly as a means of suggesting Spanish settlement to the court (6).

Columbus's motivation is difficult to interpret, but it seems that he is emphasizing the abundance of the land and the timidity of the people in order to show the potential of this land for settlement, conversion, and material exploitation:

La gente d'esta ysla y de todas las otras que he fallado y he avido noticia, andan todos desnudos, hombres y mugeres, así como sus madres los paren, aunque algunas mugeres se cobijan un solo lugar con una foja de yerva ó una cofia de algodón que para ellos fazen. ellos no tienen fierro, ni azero, ni armas, ni so(n par)a ello, no porque no sea gente bien dispuesta y de fermosa estatura, salvo que son muy te(merosos) á maravilla. no tienen otras armas salvo las armas de las cañas, quando est(án) con la simiente, á (la)qual ponen al cabo un palillo agudo; é no osan usar de aquellas. (7, 9)

The people of this island, and of the other islands which I have found and of which I have information, all go naked, men and women, as their mothers bore them, although some women cover a single place with the leaf of a plant or with a net of cotton which they make for the purpose. They have no iron or steel or weapons, nor are they fitted to use them, not because they are not well built men and of handsome stature, but because they are very marvellously timorous. They have no other arms than weapons made of canes, cut in seeding time, to the ends of which they fix a small sharpened stick. And they do not dare to make use of these. (6, 8)

This prelapsarian nakedness does not prevent Columbus from speculating on the Natives' desire and ability to make war. They fled the Spaniards, but later came to give them whatever possessions the Spaniards desired—primarily gold. Columbus says that he soon prevented his men from trading worthless things for gold, and he himself gave the Natives "mill cosas buenas" ("a thousand handsome good things" [9]) so "y allende d'esto se fazan cristianos, y se inclinen al amor é servicio de Sus Altezas y de toda la nación castellana, é procuren de ayuntar é nos dar de las cosas que tienen en abundancia, que nos son necessarias" (9, 11)—they "might become Christians and be inclined to the love and service of their highnesses and of the whole Castilian nation, and strive to aid us and to give us of the things which they have in

abundance and which are necessary to us" (8). Whether gold is as necessary as food is left unsaid.

Columbus now emphasizes their religion and intelligent explanations. He also represents the Natives as not having a creed and as not worshipping idols. In his image they are a blank slate ready for conversion and do not have any bad religious habits that might prejudice Columbus's opponents in Spain against the indigenous peoples and, ultimately, against Columbus's enterprise. These Natives, Columbus says, think that he and his men are from heaven not because the Natives are unintelligent but because they have never seen people with clothes and such ships. Columbus admires their ability as navigators and, once again, marvels "que es maravilla la buena cuenta qu'ellos dan de toto" (11); "how good an account they give of everything" (10).<sup>6</sup> His praise of the Natives' powers to give proper account later allows Columbus to accept an apparent mixture of story and explanation without differentiation.

In the "Letter of Columbus" there are contradictions. Later, Díaz speaks of Montezuma's (Mutezuma in Pagden's edition of Cortés's *Letters from Mexico*) divided mind, which became a trope in the Spanish view of the fall of the Mexican empire, but Columbus's letter suggests a division in his mind (or perhaps in the corporate Spanish editorial project on Columbus and the encounter). After saying how timid the Natives were, Columbus now admits that he took some of them by force:

Y luego que legué á las Indias, en la primera isla que hallé tomé por fuerça algunos d'ellos, para que deprendiesen y me diesen noticia de lo que avia en aquellas partes, é así fué que luego entendieron, y nos á ellos, quando por lengua ó señas; y estos han aprovechado mucho. (11)

And as soon as I arrived in the Indies, in the first Island which I found, I took by force some of them, in order that they might learn and give me information of that which there is in those parts, and so it was that they soon understood us, and we them, either by speech or signs, and they have been very serviceable. (10)

Columbus then reiterates that the Natives still treat him like a god and says that they incline to Christianity, but what he does not emphasize is why he thought it necessary to use force to capture indigenous peoples as interpreters. Was it his ignorance

of their timidity or was it a feeling that they were his property because they were, in his eyes at least, subjects and possessions of the crown? Almost like Swift or Borges, Columbus, perhaps with a certain credulity and perhaps not, mixes precise measurements and details of the land with fantastic creatures. For instance, after having given the measurements of the island Juana, which he says is larger than England and Scotland, Columbus states that one of its provinces, Avan, contains people that are born with tails (Jane 12).

The possession of gold and the notion of force reassert themselves when Columbus promises Ferdinand and Isabella gold mines and great riches and when he speaks about his fortification of the town, which Columbus names La Navidad. He mentions that he has left men to fortify it, so that at the time of writing they would have completed it. Columbus's anxiety contradicts or conflicts with his earlier claim that the Natives are timid because he has left "gente que abasta" ("sufficient men") for the building and with arms, artillery, and provisions for more than a year. The anxious Columbus claims that he has left them a ship and a master to build others, perhaps in case they have to leave or escape, and adds that the king of that land is such a good friend "que se preciava de me llamar y tener por hermano" (Jane 15)—"that he was proud to call me, and to treat me as, a brother" (14). Then Columbus's anxiety becomes explicit:

é, aunque le mudase la voluntad á ofender esta gente, él ni los suyos no saben qué sean armas, y andan desnudos, como ya he dicho, é son los más temerosos que ay en el mundo; así que solamente la gente que allá queda es para destoir toda aquella tierra; y es ysla sin peligros de sus personas, sabiéndose regir. (15)

And even if he were to change his attitude to one of hostility towards these men, he and his do not know what arms are and they go naked, as I have already said, and are the most timorous people that there are in the world, so that the men whom I have left there alone would suffice to destroy all that land, and the island is without danger for their persons, if they know how to govern themselves. (14)

If Columbus's men might not "sabiéndose regir" ("know how to govern themselves") and if the indigenous peoples might rebel against Spanish possession, why then is Columbus leaving them there? After this extreme moment of vulnerability and self-justification, Columbus switches the topic.

In a very small space he compresses the topics of women, private property, monsters, race, and climate. Men, except the king, seem content to be with one woman; the Natives share and do not seem to value property as a private possession. Columbus admits that he has not come across any "hombres monstruos, como muchos pensavan" (15)—"human monstrosities, as many expected" (14). (See Columbus's annotations of *Imago Mundi* [Jane 14].) However, Columbus proceeds to report at length danger in paradise, a kind of menace that he has heard about but not witnessed, a human monstrosity, that is the coming together of Cannibals and Amazons, those who eat men and those who can do without them:

ási que monstruos no he hallado, ni noticia, salvo de una ysla 'Quaris', la segunda á la entrada de las Yndias, que es poblada de una gente que tienen en todas las yslas por muy feroces, los quales comen carne humana. estos tienen muchas canoas, con las quales corren todas las yslas de India, y roban y toman quanto pueden; ellos no son más disformes que los otros, salvo que tienen costumbre de traer los cabellos largos como mugeres, y usan arcos y flechas de las mismas armas de cañas, con un palillo al cabo, por defecto de fierro que no tienen. son feroces entre estos otros pueblos que son en demasiado grado covardes, mas yo no los tengo en nada más que á los otros. estos son aquellos que tratan con las mugeres de 'Matinino', que es la primera ysla, partiendo de España para las Indias, que se falla, en la qual no ay hombre ninguno. ellas no usan exercicio femenino, salvo arcos y flechas, como los sobredichios, de cañas, y se arman y cobigan con launas de arambre, de que tienen mucho. (15, 17)

As I have found no monsters, so I have had no report of any, except in an island "Quaris," the second at the coming into the Indies, which is inhabited by a people who are regarded in all the islands as very fierce and who eat human flesh. They have many canoes with which they range through all the islands of India and pillage and take as much as they can. They are no more malformed than the others, except that they have the custom of wearing their hair long like women, and they use bows and arrows of the same cane stems, with a small piece of wood at the end, owing to lack of iron which they do not possess. They are ferocious among these other people who are cowardly to an excessive degree, but I make no more account of them than of the rest. These are those who have intercourse with the women of 'Matinino,' which is the first island met on the way from Spain to the Indies, in which there is not a man. These women engage in no feminine occupation, but use bows and arrows of cane, like those already mentioned, and they arm and protect themselves with plates of copper, of which they have much. (14, 16)

Here are monstrous humans who threaten the boundaries of gender roles, men with hair like women and women who fight like men. Columbus's annotations to *Imago Mundi* show that he was aware of these stories of human monstrosities, and these tales may have led him to expect them on his voyage: his notes to *Historia Rerum Ubique Gesterum* demonstrate his acquaintance with stories of lands wholly inhabited by women and this may have prepared him to expect or be receptive to stories of such women in the lands he encountered.<sup>7</sup> These Native women are fated to be "Amazons," perhaps against all fact and out of the need for such a legend to sustain the European, or at least "Columbus's," world view. It becomes difficult to know whether the myths and stories of Europe help to determine the image of the Native. Does history imitate story here or does history as event derive from, or find its form in, history as story?

The mediation of writing and reading in Columbus seems to affect the images of the Native at first contact. Perhaps it also has an effect on the transmission and editing of his account as well as on the rhetorical relation between speaker or writer and audience, between Columbus and the sovereigns (whom he has in mind and whom he addresses). Further, this relation has a very material dimension. Columbus proceeds to promise Isabella and Ferdinand vast riches and slaves in return for their "muy poquita ayuda" (17)—"very slight assistance" (16). In this possible contract, in this quid pro quo, the Natives get lost, are transformed into slaves. These slaves, as many as sovereigns shall order to be shipped, will be chosen from the idolaters, so that Columbus can have a clear conscience and can, with a highly imperfect knowledge of the language and culture of the Natives, decide who practises idolatry and who does not. Slavery is fine for those who, in Columbus's opinion, worship idols instead of Christ. In fact, like Las Casas (1: 46), I do not think that Columbus's forcible possession of the Natives as interpreters was justifiable and I suspect that it marks the beginning of the Spanish maltreatment of the indigenous peoples. Columbus took several Natives with him on the voyage home, and only seven survived the voyage. One of these survivors acted as an interpreter on the second voyage. As we do not have the Natives' account, we can wonder

whether they went on Columbus's ship of their own accord or whether they were forced. Just after saying he would have done much more, if his ships had served him "como razón demandava" (17)—"as reason demanded" (16)—perhaps trying to get the sovereigns to outfit him better, Columbus returns to the men he left at Navidad. Here perhaps are the men he abandoned or pawned as evidence of the success and commitment of his voyage: they are pawns to his ambition. As he began the letter, he ends it—with an appeal to God: "el qual da á todos aquellos que andan su camino victoria de cosas que parecen imposibles" (19) ("Who gives to all those who walk in His way triumph over things which appear to be impossible"; 18), like Columbus who has "vista" ("ocular evidence"; 18) rather than the conjectural talk and fables about these lands. The Redeemer has given the king and queen of Spain a great religious and temporal victory. Columbus wishes for Spain and Christendom to hold "grandes fiestas" ("great feasts") and to give "oraciones solemnes" ("solemn thanks") to the Holy Trinity for "en tornándose tantos pueblos á nuestra sancta fe" (19)—"the turning of so many peoples to our holy faith" (18). He speaks of the conversion as a *fait accompli*. The ultimate image of the Natives is of two kinds, the devout Christian and the idolatrous slave. The disturbing implication is that the Natives will not have a choice in the image that the Europeans make for them, and that this image will materially affect their lives beyond recognition.

The problem of mediation and evidence recurs in encounter literature, so that the image of the Native remains uncertain, stereotypical, or obscure. About 50 years after Cortés's conquest of New Spain, Bernal Díaz, who had been with Francisco Hernandez, Juan de Grijalvá, and Hernan Cortés, resumed this story of the conquest because he thought that Gomara and Gonzalo de Illescas had misrepresented it (Cohen 7). The Spaniards on Hernandez's expedition to Mexico were there because they did not have a grant of indigenous peoples in Cuba, who were the means to wealth. About their first contact with the indigenous peoples of Yucatan and Mexico, Díaz says that they thought them more civilized than the Cuban Natives because they covered themselves with cotton clothing. The Natives seemed friendly to



the Spaniards just before they ambushed them and, after fierce fighting, retreated. The Spaniards then found gold in the Native prayer-houses, including idols. These houses "tenían muchos ídolos de barro, unos como caras de demonios, y otros como de mujeres, y otros de ostras malas figuras, de manera que al parecer estaban haciendo sodomías los unos indios con los otros" (Díaz 1: 47)—"contained many idols of baked clay, some with demons' faces, some with women's, and others equally ugly which seemed to represent Indians committing sodomy with one another" (Cohen 19). The treachery and cowardice of indigenous peoples, the danger of idols, the disturbance of gender boundaries are as much in Díaz as in Columbus. It is as if the Europeans have an image of the Natives that they expect the Natives to fulfill, so that they can justify occupying their lands.

By the time the pilgrims were ready to leave Holland, as William Bradford reports, some among them already feared the indigenous peoples. At this time, the Netherlands was the main centre for the publication of illustrated narratives of voyages (see 8 n. 26). Such narratives were readily available to the pilgrims. Bradford notes that some of them feared that if they went to America and escaped the elements, they

should yet be in continual danger of the savage people, who are cruel, barbarous and most treacherous, being most furious in their rage and merciless where they overcome; not being content only to kill and take away life, but delight to torment men in the most bloody manner that may be; flaying some alive with the shells of fishes, cutting off the members and joints of others by piecemeal and broiling on the coals, eat the collops of their flesh in their sight whilst they live, with other cruelties horrible to be related. (26)

Whatever the relation of fact to fiction here, as in the case of Columbus and Díaz, religious and secular narratives about the New World did not allow Europeans enough wonder and openness to see the world entirely anew. They brought expectations with them that helped to judge the Natives before the actual encounter. History as writing brought with it an encounter before the encounter became a historical event. The image of the Native seems to have preceded the Native, and the Natives soon suffered when they didn't comply to the image and when they did. The image could degrade them as much as idealize

them: the price the Natives paid for this "imaging" and "imagining" was material. The Europeans made them into texts the Europeans alone could interpret, and often with ready-made interpretations.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> After his journey to Brobdingnag, Gulliver reports on how Captain Thomas Wilcocks, who has rescued him, receives Gulliver's report of the land of the giants:

The Captain was very well satisfied with this plain Relation I had given him; and said, he hoped when we returned to *England*, I would oblige the World by putting it in Paper, and making it publick. My Answer was, that I thought we were already overstocked with Books of Travels: That nothing could now pass which was not extraordinary; wherein I doubted, some Authors less consulted Truth than their own Vanity or Interest, or the Diversion of ignorant Readers. That my Story could contain little besides common Events, without those ornamental Descriptions of strange Plants, Trees, Birds, and other Animals; or the barbarous Customs and Idolatry of savage People, with which most Writers abound. However, I thanked him for his good Opinion, and promised to take the Matter into my Thoughts. (Swift 141-42)

The relation that Swift gives to Gulliver in the 1720s is anything but plain.

It is with some caution, scepticism, and humility that I face this well-trod topic, realizing that it is easy to deny vanity vainly as Gulliver does and to feel that one among us will avoid the many snares that this vast literature sets before us. Of course the events that Gulliver represents are anything but common. Nor have we caught Swift and him when we read the jarring phrase, "the barbarous Customs and Idolatry of savage People," because in the 1735 edition Swift attaches the prefatory "Letter from Capt. Gulliver to His Cousin Sympson," in which Gulliver admits, even before the reader witnesses the four voyages, that he has given up on reforming humanity or the Yahoos as they are so corrupt as to make such a project absurd (7-8). In facing his Yahoo critics Gulliver criticizes them:

Do these miserable Animals presume to think that I am so far degenerated as to defend my Veracity; *Yahoo* as I am, it is well known through all *Houyhnhnmland*, that by the Instructions and Example of my illustrious Master, I was able in the Compass of two Years (although I confess with the utmost Difficulty) to remove that Infernal Habit of Lying, Shuffling, Deceiving, and Equivocating, so deeply rooted in the very Souls of all my Species; especially the *Europeans*. (7)

It is a commonplace that Swift uses irony and shifts in perspective in service of his satire, so that his reader is off balance and cannot assume a position for Gulliver and his creator. While Gulliver has called the Natives barbarians, he has turned his savage indignation against all of humanity, but especially the Europeans. As in *A Modest Proposal* Swift is satirizing the blindness of the imperial centre.

Nor is this an isolated critique of Europe. The King of Brobdingnag, at least in Gulliver's report, hopes that, owing to his life of travels, Gulliver has escaped the vices of England, which Gulliver extols chauvinistically. None the less, the king does not mince words about the English:

But, by what I have gathered from your own Relation, and the Answers I have with much pains wringed and extorted from you; I cannot but conclude the Bulk of your Natives, to be the most pernicious Race of little odious Vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth. (126)

Not even Gulliver's obstruction and imperial chauvinism can prevent the king from piercing English ideology.

- <sup>2</sup> See Hart, "New Historical Shakespeare," *Theater and the World*, and "Traces, Resistances, and Contradictions."

3 I wish to thank Daniela Boccassini and her co-organizers of the Pacific Northwest Renaissance Conference (PNRC) for inviting me to present a briefer version of this essay in March 1993. I would also like to thank Ian MacLaren, who afterwards made me aware of a similar view to my own on the difficulties the text of Columbus's writing presents to us. (See Henige.) A delay in publication, the good will of the editor of this journal, and sound suggestions from one of the readers allowed me to take Henige's and other recent work into consideration in this final version. Most of the additions occur in the notes. More generally, though less perceptibly here, I benefited from conversations with the President and Fellows of Clare Hall and with members of the Faculty of History at the University of Cambridge, most notably with Peter Burke and Mark Kaplanoff. My thanks also to Marjorie Chibnall, who invited me to a session on discovery at the British Academy, and who, in response to my reading in medieval voyages from Europe, alerted me to a good summary. (See Phillips.) I want especially to thank Anthony Pagden for directing my attention beyond Columbus, Cabot, Cartier, and other explorers to the intellectual assimilation of America in Europe during the sixteenth century. Those audiences in England, France, and Australia who during the past year heard me give various papers in the field know how much humanists, collectors, and administrators have entered my study.

4 Three recent works on Columbus include important discussions of Columbus's texts; see Cummins, Zamora, and Fernández-Armesto. Their views are quite different from Henige's. Cummins has tried to reconstruct as closely as possible Columbus's *Journal* from the evidence available, mainly in Las Casas and Ferdinand Columbus:

My version, therefore, is not Columbus's original, but then neither is Fernando's, nor the Las Casas manuscript, nor any of the myriad translations which have slavishly followed the slapdash Las Casas text. What follows is, I hope, a version corresponding as closely in content to the original as it is possible to produce while that original remains lost. (76)

Unlike Jane and Henige, Cummins believes in an original text by Columbus. Zamora sees two editorial camps that have not reached a consensus: "the Columbian texts have been deemed both very reliable and largely untrustworthy testimonies on the Discovery" (3). Zamora gives a clear account of the status of the text of the "Letter to Luis de Santángel" (15 February 1493) and the "Letter to the Sovereigns" (4 March 1493) (5-6). The "Letter to Santángel" was in Spanish and was translated into Italian prose and verse and Latin prose very soon after its appearance. Zamora argues that this letter was probably based on the one addressed to the crown the following month and that someone other than Columbus substantially revised, if not composed, it. The February letter, which we have in Santángel's hand, was lost or suppressed and stood in for the letter to the crown for five hundred years (Zamora 5-6). Rather than undermine my argument, Zamora's attribution of the "Letter to Santángel" to someone other than Columbus makes the role of Columbus as an author function and a collective cultural production even more important. The fact is we do not know whether Columbus wrote this or other texts. Even the textual status of the "Letter to the Sovereigns" is uncertain and may be questioned. Zamora admits as much (9-20, 211). One of the provocative points Zamora raises in her comparison of the letter to Santángel with that to the Sovereigns is that the latter emphasizes more the connection between the discovery of the New World and the reconquest of Jerusalem (10-20).

Felipe Fernández-Armesto tries as much as possible to present Columbus in his own words, that is to pare him down to those passages that seem to be in keeping with Columbus's style (9-16). He warns of three major scruples that have made historians suspicious about the status of this document: it was datelined near the Canaries when Columbus was off the Azores; the postscript is dated 14 March and claims that Columbus had just reached Lisbon when he had been there for ten days; no copy in Columbus's hand has endured. None the less, although one

should read the document with these problems in mind, "[t]here is no reason . . . to see it as other than wholly or substantially Columbus's work" (101-03).

These textual differences regarding the Columbian canon do not prevent new characterizations of Columbus the man or his writings. For Djelal Kadir, Columbus is the first in a line of "American" prophets come to the New World who plead in "a rhetoric of prophetic injunction" (64).

- 5 The Dover edition is a slightly altered and corrected republication in one volume of Nos. LXV and LXX of the Second Series, London: Hakluyt Society, 1930 and 1933 (for 1929 and 1932) edited and translated by Cecil James.
- 6 Stephen Greenblatt has directed our attention once again to the European desire to possess these marvels. The legal nature of the encounter cannot be underestimated. At the PNR, William M. Hamlin gave an interesting paper, on the marvellous and Renaissance romance, especially in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, entitled "Making Religion of Wonder: Reading, Writing, and the Divine Attribution in Renaissance Ethnography and Romance." I also want to thank him for participating in an exchange of comments on each other's papers.
- 7 Jacques Le Goff includes a miniature (Plate 11) that illustrates the medieval revival or translation of classical anxiety about monsters. The image is of human monsters from the ends of the earth. These surreal images, according to Le Goff, reflect "a subject conjured up by the inferior Roman vulgarizer Solinus in the third century and taken up again by Honorius Augustodunensis in the twelfth century" (172-73). For the relation of patriarchal territories to images of the female in the Renaissance, see Stallybrass; for other views of sexual difference in the period, see Ferguson et al. Annette Kolodny looks at the relation between the land of the new world and the woman's body, and Patricia Parker examines the connection between women and the monstrous in male discourse.

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