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Assembling Caliban: French and Other European Depictions of American Bodies in the Sixteenth Century

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The present study elucidates several of the key tropes and figures employed by a select group of French and European commentators and artists in their attempt to contextualize New World discovery. Utilizing travel narratives, voyager reports, and literary materials, this study traces a specific thematic genealogy from the late thirteenth century to the end of the Renaissance. Over a period of three hundred plus years, various European texts from *Mandeville's Travels* to *The Tempest* depicted European encounters with foreign bodies. While descriptions varied, certain recurring themes and tropes gradually developed as European explorers expanded the scope of their ethno-geographic inquiry. One particular episode—the failed French colonial experiment at Guanabara, Brazil—dramatically altered the evolution of European literary understandings of cultural difference. This study hopes to better situate this Franco-Brazilian encounter within a broader Renaissance cultural aesthetics. The writings of a series of French thinkers including André Thevet, Jean de Léry, and Michel de Montaigne, are examined here in order to both explore their thematic heritage and to access their intellectual impact.

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Chapter 1

Host of Images: The Renaissance and America

In 1560, a small French settlement failed in Brazil. After five years of misery and discord, the guns of Portuguese warships laid waste to a colonial project of startling ineptitude. Fort Coligny, an island outpost built by Huguenot settlers and named in honor of the famous French Protestant Admiral, was quickly subdued. The remaining French survivors fled to the mainland to regroup among their Tamoio allies, and while sporadic resistance continued for another seven years, any serious hope for the realization of "France Antarctique," had long since been abandoned.

Ultimately, the physical and diplomatic influence of the colony proved relatively inconsequential. By the time vice-admiral Nicolas de Villegagnon arrived in 1555 with his first group of colonists, the French were in no real position to challenge Portuguese authority in the region. Even if Lisbon had been somewhat slow to establish a firm foothold in Brazil, domestic turmoil back in France assured the colony's fate. With religious tensions rising in Paris and environs, a small Huguenot settlement a hemisphere away was hardly first priority.

Indeed, the project seemed doomed from the beginning. Within a year of landing at Guanabara, Villegagnon had lost so much control over his original party of six hundred that he felt the need to write to John Calvin in Geneva for assistance.[1] Sympathizing with his cause, the former Sorbonne classmate of the vice-admiral promptly sent reinforcements—hysteria ensued. The arriving Calvinists, with whose greater sense of zeal and discipline Villegagnon hoped to reform his ineffective first contingent, turned on him almost immediately. Questions of dogma, not colonization, gripped the minds of the passionate new

[1] The original letter, written in Latin, is currently housed in the Library of Geneva, for a French translation see Paul Gaffarel, *Histoire du Brésil français au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1878), 393-397.

arrivals. Villegagnon, asserting his right to dictate matters of doctrine, provoked a fight: the Eucharist proved his undoing. Surrounded by cannibals, the sacrament of communion took on special significance. Back in Europe, the question of transubstantiation was already a point of violent contention—in a foreign land where nearby indigenous tribes regularly engaged in anthropophagy it became explosive. Calvinist doctrine maintained that the wine and bread ingested during communion stood as simple signs representing the body and the blood of Christ, yet Villegagnon, who insisted on a greater connection between the physical corpus and the symbolic act, proclaimed himself unconvinced.[2] A minister was promptly sent back to Geneva to consult with Calvin, yet before his return a sharp rift developed. The new arrivals presumed their leader a crypto-papist and began partaking of the Eucharist in secret. All the while, Villegagnon grew bolder in his doctrinal assertions. In the words of one of the conflicts most outspoken chroniclers, pastor Jean de Lery, "he wanted to alter everything to suit his own appetite."[3]

Léry's accusation is charged with a certain queasy metaphor, for gustatory fixations characterize the entire colonial episode.[4] After being consistently denied their rations, Léry and a number of other Calvinists were progressively ostracized from the colony. Eventually, Villegagnon would expel them completely. Abandoning Fort Coligny, the small band headed to the mainland where they lived for two months amongst the Tupi speaking allies of the French, a native population that practiced ritual execution and consumption of their enemies.

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[2] For more on the Eucharist, cannibals, voyagers and the interpretation of the sacraments see Frank Lestringant, *Une sainte horreur, ou , Le voyage en eucharistie: XVIe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996).

[3] Jean de Lery, *Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil* (first published Geneva: 1578). Four later editions were printed at both Paris and Geneva (1580, 1585, 1599, 1611). I site here throughout using Janet Whatley's English translation *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 16.

[4] See Janet Whatley's excellent essay "Food and the Limits of Civility: The Testimony of Jean de Léry," in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Winter, 1984), 387-400.

Eventually, Léry would return to France, but on a disastrous voyage where passengers and crew found themselves forced to consume every piece of non-human flesh aboard their floundering ship: monkeys, parrots, rats, and boiled leather. While an illustrious pastoral career awaited him in Europe, it is ultimately the two months Léry spent living along the coast amongst "the cannibals" that are of broader historical interest. If the French experiment at Guanabara deserves anything more than a footnote in the record of early European colonial experience, it has less to do with whatever historical reality might exist in the narrative just presented, and so much to do with the fictions provoked by its telling.[5]

Out of the mouth of Guanabara sprang a multitude of images—images of sleek young girls and sinewy young men, severed heads, face paint and miraculous regalia, limbs torn and flayed, ageless breasts, tonsured scalps, and a hundred blood-stained mouths; in short, a greater piece of the extensive myth of the American body. Certainly, as elsewhere there were pictures. In 1575, André Thevet, a Franciscan who had escaped Guanabara in the first months of the colony's founding, commissioned woodcuts for his *Cosmographie Universelle*, and when the German Hans Staden produced his wildly popular captivity narrative detailing years of living with the Tupinamba, he too made sure to include illustrations.[6] But these are

[5] This narrative is gathered from multiple source materials besides those provided by Jean de Léry: Andre Thevet's *Les Singularitez de la France Antarctique* (Paris, 1557) is one of the first published account concerning the French colonial experience in Brazil, although Thevet left before the conflict with the Calvinist arrivals occurred. The majority of the correspondence of Nicolas de Villegagnon, Nicolas Barré, Gaspard de Coligny, and John Calvin have been gathered and published in Gaffarel, *Histoire du Brésil Français au XVIe siècle*. It should be noted that Jean Crespin also included accounts of Calvinists persecuted by Villegagnon in subsequent publications of his *Actes des Martyrs* (Geneva, 1564). Non-published political apologia provided by Villegagnon as well as political invective delivered by Calvinist pastor Pierre Richier is housed at both the Biblioteque Nationale and the Library of Geneva (respectively). For a broader narrative discussion of the relationship between the colony, the Portuguese, and the natives involved on both sides of the conflict, see John Hemming, *Red Gold: The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians* specifically the chapter "Antarctic France" (London: Macmillan London, 1978).

[6] Andre Thevet, *Cosmographie Universelle* (Paris: 1575); Hans Staden, *Warhaftige Historia und beschreibung eyner Landtschafft der Wilden Nacketen, Grimmigen Menschfresser-Leuthen in der Newenwelt America gelegen* (1557). Staden's story has been recently published in a new English translation by Neil L. Whitehead

only the most obvious images birthed in Brazil. Descriptions reached Europe as early as 1557, when Thevet published his first report of the expedition, *Les Singularitez de la France Antarctique,* a jumbled account of pineapples, peanuts, sloths, snakes, Amazons, cannibals and other strange bodies.[7] More nuanced depictions would follow. Over twenty years later, the aforementioned Jean de Léry, incensed by Thevet's positive characterization of Villegagnon in the *Cosmographie*, produced his extraordinary *Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil*. So rich and detailed was Lèry's account of his two month stay amongst the natives of the coast that the work became something of a vade mecum for the young Levi-Strauss, who famously carried a copy on his person when he arrived in Brazil nearly four hundred years after the failure of the original French colony. In an interview given in 1994, Levi-Strauss cited the work as an inspiration: Léry is "the first: to see, to encounter the pristine, the 'first White' to penetrate into the indigenous community."[8]

Indeed, it is hard not to view Léry's *Histoire* as a precocious ethnography. In an age full of coarse travelers awkwardly cobbling together firsthand experience and fantastical hearsay, Léry's personal history appears remarkably lucid, almost modern. But here it is useful to remember the teleological process of influence in order to avoid regarding Léry as precursor, when he is, in fact, inventor. If Léry seems modern it is because his work represents an entry in a series of late Renaissance works slowly articulating the values of an incipient modernity. But what I wish to present here is neither a celebration nor a critique of any one travel narrative, but instead an exploration of the rhetoric of description, the capital

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and Michael Harbsmeir in *Hans Staden's True History: An Account of Cannibal Captivity in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

[7] André Thevet, *Les Singularitez de France Antarctique* (Paris, 1558). The version I cite here is Paul Gaffarel's critical edition of the text from 1878 (Paris: Maisonneuve and Cle, Libraries-Editeurs).

[8] As originally cited in Neil Whitehead's introduction to *Hans Staden's True History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), LXXXVII.

of images, and the persistence of powerful illustrations. The primary point of inquiry is the historic imagery circulating around the idea of the Americas in the sixteenth century. More specifically, I hope to focus on those New World representations concerned with depictions of the body and its habits, not in pursuit of any one historical anatomy, but rather in pursuit of a particular impulse, namely the desire to observe and reflect.

This is in no way to suggest that ethnographic reflection has its origins in Brazil or that something peculiar occurred in the late Renaissance that suddenly allowed humanity to become self-aware. There are moments of reflection and ignorance in every age, and the sixteenth century, despite the privileged place it holds in some archaeologies of thought, is no different.[9] However, it is the position of this inquiry that certain values and thematic trends weave their way through time and make themselves visible in rhetorical and aesthetic gestures that might be traced through careful observation.

While much has been said about the iconography of the New World and the thematic heritage that supplied it with so many of its figures, there has been an overwhelming tendency to talk of "European perceptions" (or more recently "Colonial Perceptions") without properly demarcating source material. Even at its most detailed and specific, inquiry has generally been organized around a model which assumes that cultural trends operate concentrically according to continent, country, region, province, and village. While this locally focused model is preferable to the heavy generalization of a nationally organized analysis (e.g. "The French thought X about native peoples, the Portuguese thought Y") it still

[9] This comment should not be read as an indictment of either Foucauldian "genealogies of thought" or the notion of the broader Renaissance itself. As will become apparent, both frameworks are useful for my purpose here and will be referenced later on.

does not account for all the complicated ways images are shared, distributed, processed, and employed across textual (not regional) space.[10]

As such, throughout this essay I will provide a close reading of widely distributed literary documents, not in an attempt to define "European perceptions" but in an attempt to trace a broader textual thematics. Popular travel narratives from the late thirteenth to the early seventeenth century will be examined with the aim of providing greater insight into the portrayal of American bodies. By charting the evolution of popular travel literature during this period, common metaphors, tropes, and themes can all hopefully be detected and identified. While a broad scope facilitates my overall argument, specific attention will be paid to sixteenth-century documents detailing the Americas, particularly those pertaining to Brazil. By contextualizing these depictions in a more extensive European aesthetics, it might be possible to bridge the space of the Atlantic, which has for so long now often precluded the Americas from discussions of the Renaissance.

Reconciling trends: The culture of curiosity of the late-Renaissance

Something intellectually dynamic occurred at the end of the sixteenth century. A remarkable and somewhat counter-intuitive shift took place that dramatically altered European perceptions of the natural world.[11] A bizarre and sometimes charming curiosity

[10] This project is informed by those theorists who have argued in favor of a more literary treatment of historical texts. While not entirely agreeing with all of their assumptions about history and historical representation, this project proceeds utilizing many of their insights. Paul Ricoeur *Temp et Recit* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1983-1985); Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987); F.R. Ankersmit, *Historical Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

[11] While I employ the term Europe as a matter of convenience, it should be noted that the trends described throughout are primarily specific to North Western Europe (France, the Netherlands, the realm of the Hapsburgs, the city-states of Italy, and England). One should be aware that the expression of these trends was subject to local and temporal variation, and what holds true for Paris in 1573 might not hold true for Venice in 1598. Unfortunately, the conflation of Europe, as Stephen Greenblatt argued in 1991, has and continues to be a problem for those working in all periods. Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 8-9.

marks an aesthetic transition, and scholars have often commented on the palpable sense of awe contained in the descriptions of the late Renaissance.[12] It was a time of proto-wonder cabinets and avid collecting. Oddities, both natural and miraculous, gained in currency, and items like nautilus shells, unicorn horns, stuffed crocodiles, and lodestones were prized by wealthy enthusiasts.[13] The eccentric physician and collector Felix Platter, for example, compiled an enviable collection at Basel, where he amassed sixty drawers full of marvelous objects. Collections like Platter's were so popular and renowned, that they often drew in prominent figures of the nobility curious to examine their contents.[14]

In a similar shift towards the sublime and bizarre, the careful attention to proportion and classical ratio of a previous generation of artists gave way to a broader fascination with more organic bodies. Artisans turned gilded ostrich eggs into goblets, and grafted corals and antlers supported images of the crucifix. In a failed attempt to reproduce newly imported Chinese porcelain, French potter Bernard Palissy succeeded in forging his own unique brand of rustic ceramics featuring life casts of lizards, snakes, and sea life.[15] It was also at this time that Guiseppe Arcimboldo produced his famous fruit and vegetable portraits for the Hapsburg court at Venice. Meanwhile, throughout the continent, a popular mania for signs and portents fueled the proliferation of a prodigy literature cataloging monstrous births and

[12] Out of the myriad books and articles published on the relationship between science and culture during the sixteenth century, Katherine Park and Loraine Datson's *Wonders and the Order of Nature* is particularly insightful and extensively illustrated. *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (New York: Zone Books, 1998).
[13] Ibid., Chaper 4 "Marvelous Particulars."
[14] Brian W. Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 40.
[15] Martin Kemp, *Visualizations: The Nature Book of Art and Science* (Berkley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 2000).

other queer natural phenomena.[16] Many of these publications came complete with illustrations, and for the first time, popular images of the mythically fantastic and deformed—images that had been circulating Europe for decades—were gathered together within the pages of singular texts.

Only stimulating the European fascination with all things alien, American natives began drifting through royal courts shortly after 1500. Some came of their own will, like the Brazilian king who surprised Henry VIII by wearing bones in his cheeks and a precious stone in his lower lip: accordingly, "all his apparel, behavior, and gesture, were very strange to the beholders."[17] Some, like an Eskimo mysteriously kidnapped by an English expedition in the early 1500s, journeyed to Europe only after being compelled through use of force. Still others seemed to have been more than eager to participate in their own description. In 1550, the city of Rouen marked the entry of Henri II by famously staging the so-called "Fête Brésilienne." During the pageant, fifty visiting Tupinamba joined two hundred and fifty other sailors and prostitutes beside the Seine to depict for the king scenes of daily life in Brazil. All involved were traditionally unclad and went about their domestic routines before staging a mock raid on an enemy village and then assisting in the destruction of a Portuguese warship.[18]

This was just one of the many "pageants" involved in the production of the American body. The majority, of course, would unfold far less literally in textual descriptions, sensationalized illustrations, and functional metaphors that equated impassioned and exotic

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[16] Pierre Boaistuau *Histoires prodigieuses* (Paris, 1580); Ambroise Paré, *Monstres and prodiges* (Paris, 1576). For more on prodigy literature in the sixteenth century see Jean Ceard, *La nature et les prodiges: L'insolite au XVIe siècle, en France* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1977).
[17] Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* Book V (London, 1589).
[18] Frank Lestringant, *Cannibals: The Discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996). Originally published *Le Cannibale: Grandeur et Decadence* (Librairie Académique Perrin, 1994).

violence with the New World. This particularly remarkable moment of ethnographic displacement at Rouen will be explored in a later chapter, suffice it to note that the cannibal theme was rehearsed in France years before travelers such as Jean de Léry and André Thevet yielded up their own accounts.

Clearly, the presence of strange and foreign bodies was manifest all over Western Europe throughout the latter half of the sixteenth century. Images long floating in local and regional imaginations appeared on full display in private collections, public exhibitions, and the pages of books and other popular print media. While highly esteemed in their time, these images occupied a cultural position that might strike the modern observer as awkward, for while depictions of the strange and wondrous were highly scrutinized and cataloged, they were rarely aggregated into fixed and rigid categorizes. Thus, it is possible to find the same depiction of a monstrous birth operating in a piece of religious propaganda, a scientific treatise, and a popular work of entertainment.[19] While a call for greater scrutiny would be made at the turn of the seventeenth century in the works of intellectuals such as Bacon and later Descartes, the majority of those living in the latter half of the 1500s seemed content to observe, catalog, and interpret according to the dictates of their own personal politics and tastes.[20] This fascination with the strange and wondrous then is perhaps best thought of as a broad aesthetic movement positioned precariously between the aesthetic precepts of Antiquity and an incipient empirical science.

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[19] A deformed calf born at Freiberg with a flap of skin that resembled a cowl functioned in Peter Malanchthon and Martin Luther's as a figure of religious satire (the monk-calf) in their popular antipapal tract *Deuttung der czwo grewlichen Figuren* (1523) while it can also be found in the pages of surgeon Ambroise Paré's *Monstres and Prodigies* (1576) as an example of a monstrous birth conceived through "an act of too much imagination."

[20] For a discussion of the English scientific community operating shortly before and after Sir Francis Bacon, see Deborah E. Harkness, *The Jewel House: Elizabethan London and the Scientific Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

Ultimately, the move from the more classically-informed predilections of the early Renaissance can be explained by a number of developments, perhaps the most important being the rapid immergence of a host of new natural sciences. Botany, zoology, mineralogy, cosmography and geography—all once contained beneath the unifying banner of *philosophia naturalis*—slowly began to achieve autonomy.[21] In Venice, Florence, Paris, Basel and Geneva, the printing press facilitated the production and circulation of handbooks and multi-volume catalogs producing an explosion in more specialized knowledge.[22] While long consulted classical authorities such as Aristotle and Pliny fell increasingly into question, the medical sciences also experienced a metamorphosis, and even if fields such as surgery and pharmacology failed to duplicate the massive strides made in anatomy, they too still began to break from older classical models.[23] The publication of Vesalius' *De humani corporis fabrica* in 1543 forced an entire reevaluation of the human body—what had once lain hidden below the skin was suddenly revealed facilitating what historian Jonathan Sawday has provocatively labeled a Renaissance "culture of dissection."[24] Never before had the workings of the human organism received such detailed attention, and new images of split torsos, opened skulls, partitioned limbs, and organs disembodied from the greater corpus became available at the same time that other natural scientists busied themselves with the cataloging

[21] Brian Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
[22] See Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, Chapter 6 "Technical Literature Goes to Press" in *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and cultural transformations in early-modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
[23] For more on Renaissance medicine in general, see Nancy G. Siraisi, *History, Medicine, and the Traditions of Renaissance Learning* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).
[24] Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

of new zoological oddities, monstrous births, the so-called "Plinian races," and the alien new branch of humanity recently found in the New World.[25]

If scientific description affected a change in cultural trends, it also played a role in the decipherment of the American body by further complicating the images provided by European voyagers. However, as previously noted, science and aesthetics were not as sharply demarcated in the sixteenth century as they would later become during the early Enlightenment, and while late Renaissance scientists gladly added to their compendiums of natural diversity, they were less concerned with organizing their material into strict systems of classes. As such, the *imaginative* impact of New World discovery initially proved far greater than the *categorical* impact. Complicating things even further, the descriptions provided by early voyagers were often polemically charged, politically motivated, and oftentimes appear confused or partially fabricated. While the incoherent nature of these documents proved no problem for early scientists, it has generally frustrated historians looking to reconstruct an accurate portrait of New World encounter. In the 1960s, many of these sources—chronicles, correspondence, and propaganda—were generally abandoned by social historians looking for more solid foundations on which to base their histories. More recently, the representations found within these first American documents have come under much greater scrutiny, not in regards to their historical precision, but in regards to the function of their imaginative distortions.

Defining historiography: Beyond the iconography of conquest

For the past fifty years, scholarship concerning early European presence in the Americans has been conflicted. In the late 1960s, a once triumphant narrative of discovery,

[25] For more on the treatment of Plinian categories in the Premodern see John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981).

exploration, and adventure was increasingly called into question. As the academy became ever more mindful of the brutal realities of conquest, pandemic disease, and colonization, focus turned away from the celebration of discovery towards the plight of the "discovered." For a time, the "Age of Exploration" served as a stage on which to play out deeply contested ideological battles concerning race, imperialism, and the difficult question of historical intersubjectivity. In 1982, linguist Tzvetan Todorov published his controversial *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*—just one entry in a series of studies exploring the discursive underpinnings of New World encounter.[26] The same year, historian Anthony Pagden released *The Fall of Natural Man,* a compelling examination of the ways in which sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish intellectuals attempted to integrate the discovery of indigenous Americans into a preexisting corpus of Western knowledge.[27] It quickly became clear for some, however, that the problem was not one of historical realities (i.e. what actually played out in the first century of European presence in the Western Hemisphere) but one of historical representations (i.e. why and how did Europeans choose to depict their initial encounters, and what do these depictions reveal about a broader Euro-American discourse).

In 1991, the problem crystallized in critic Stephen Greenblatt's literary exploration of early New World source materials, *Marvelous Possessions,* a book in which he explored the "symbolic technology" of early European responses to the New World.[28] Since that time, studies of the period have increasingly focused on questions of representation—looking less for historical truths and more for rhetorical systems of description. Early chronicles,

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[26] Tzvetan Todorov, *La Conquête de l'Amérique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982).
[27] Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
[28] Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions,* 12.

correspondence, propaganda, and voyager accounts took on new life in the hands of literary critics treating the documents more as pieces of literature than reliable historical indicators. Literary historians also found the sources useful in better historicizing the work of a range of prominent artists from Rabelais to Shakespeare. More recently, such documents have become useful to those working in what might be broadly thought of as the "history of difference"—and scholars concerned with cultural borders, intersubjectivity, alterity, and liminal social encounters have lately turned out some interesting work concerning the nature of these early sources.[29]

For the most part, these literary studies have either been Euro-focused (in the case of the former literary examinations)[30] or they have been colonially focused (as is the case in the latter studies usually associated with Postcolonialism and Sub-Altern studies). Thus, descriptions of the New World have tended to serve either as a point of inquiry from which to organize a broader study of European literary texts, or as a point of polemic from which to address wider issues concerning the exertion of colonial power. Admittedly, this current study cannot claim to break from either one of these trends (the texts and images here are European in origin and much of the theoretical heritage has its basis in postcolonial thought).[31] However, it is the goal of this examination to break from the dominant narrative arc which has dictated discussions of early Euro-American contact for the past thirty some years.

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[29] These explorations, many of which focus on the concept of alterity, will be addressed later on, where they will be shown to be somewhat problematic.

[30] Literary connections between the New World and Europe have long been a fascination of the French, who since the 1800s have been exploring the link between American exoticism and authors such as Montaigne, Diderot, Rousseau and others.

[31] This statement should be qualified in order to avoid confusion—while postcolonial thought informs much of my treatment of difference as a *literary* concept, it does not inform my belief about meta-historical processes, as will be discussed briefly.

While attempting to trace any one easily identifiable narrative trend is impossible, it is fair to suggest that modern historical depictions of New World encounter have heavily relied upon some predictable binary constructions: conquest/victimization, exploitation/resistance, cunning/confusion, and balance/chaos. More recently, in an attempt to break out of an increasingly predictable narrative stasis, a number of new terms have entered the vocabulary of the discussion; however, many of these "complicating terms" all too often prove to be carefully disguised binary signifiers (e.g. hybridity signaling Eurpoean/indigenous; alterity signaling Same/Other; exchange signaling Culture1/Culture2).

In many ways, the problem is one of textual inadequacy. Historians and literary critics concerned with the Americas during the sixteenth century must confront a skewed and awkward collection of documents, much of which is highly polemical, fantastical, or both. While the arrival of colonial centers of administration, particularly in Mexico and Peru, would ultimately produce a richer source base in the Vice-Royalty of New Spain (and later on in the captaincies of Brazil) there still remains significant gaps which make it difficult to successfully emplot a narrative running from first contact to established colony.

Scholars have dealt with these source problems in multiple ways, some of which have been recounted above, others which need not be recounted here. As it stands, my goal is to provide an alternate reading of the texts that have so far framed reconstructions of the Post-Colombian experience. In other words, the best way to break from narrative stasis is to abandon the quest for narrative altogether. Not because narrative fails as a mode of meaningful historical presentation, but because periods of history exist that produce documents hostile to traditional narrative organization. My concern then is not to trace a sixteenth-century American experience—either for natives or Europeans—but to begin

charting an American tropology. Within this study analysis is specifically organized around the idea of the body, but other metaphors could likewise be proposed.

Over the course of the next five chapters I will progress an argument concerning the nature of mythic bodies and the stains they leave on cultural artifacts (pages, canvases, blocks of stone, plates of glass, hunks of wood). Primarily, I will be relying on a series of literary texts: some major, others minor; some of aesthetic merit, others of very little. I have already touched on the problematic tendency of those writing about America or other colonized spaces to conflate European identity. By stressing the unique circumstances behind the construction of each text under review, I hope to not only avoid such issues of regional conflation, but also to propose a post-national treatment (or in this case a "proto-postnational) treatment of historical sources.[32] This is not to deny the nation as a useful category of analysis, but to question its long domination of historical inquiry. Instead, I hope to emphasize individual imaginations manipulating cultural symbols instead of drowning in them.

Trafficking images: The function of mythology

As the historiography presented above makes clear, there have already been multiple landmark studies detailing the intellectual and literary mechanics of New World description: themes have been posited, tropes have been identified, and "symbolic technologies" have been ably dismantled for inspection. However, it is my belief that a significant rift exists between sixteenth-century discussions of the so-called "Indigenous Other" and the historical realities of the colonial process. This study will not attempt to mend this rift, but rather, will attempt to emphasize it by focusing on the distinctly non-colonial function of American

[32] I owe the term "proto-postnational" to Dr. Jason Smith, who suggested the term in a discussion of transnational historiography during a recent seminar.

mythologies. In doing so, a popularly held tenet of New World encounter will be significantly complicated.

So far, it has been widely accepted that various European depictions of indigenous peoples functioned within a much broader "discursive conquest" in which native groups were linguistically marginalized by a series of explorers, chroniclers, theologians, jurists, and naturalists seeking to authorize a much broader colonial project. Thus, images of cannibals, lascivious women, natural innocents, blood thirsty pagans, and even noble savages, are generally viewed as culturally salient tropes facilitating the process of colonization.[33] My goal here is not to deny such a process—clearly, European descriptions of American bodies were consistently rhetorically charged, but it is my goal to stress how rarefied and culturally bound such discourse often was.

Accordingly, a significant danger lies in the assumption that a collection of fascinating yet intellectually privileged texts—many of which were produced and predominantly disseminated in Europe—can successfully articulate the colonial experience. However, idea of a discernible "American semiotics," should not be entirely discarded. If this study draws on postcolonial thought, it is not because it presumes some type of global power model in which perceptions of cultural difference are employed to reify and paralyze subaltern communities, but rather because it explores the ways in which exotic depictions work within *a select set* of literary and intellectual texts.

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[33] Patricia Seed, for example, writes in her book *American Penitmento,* "…they classified cannibalism, human sacrifice, idolatry, and sodomy—as immoral, criminal, or merely vulgar—ordinary Spaniards used examples of such behavior to justify conquering and ruling the natives to put an end to such conduct." *American Pentimento* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). In *Marvelous Possessions*, Stephen Greenblatt advances a much more sophisticated and alluring argument in which Europeans manipulated perceptions of the sublime and marvelous in order to imaginatively take possession of the Americas. Todorov, of course, extends such processes beyond the realm of discursive possession; envisioning a conquest scenario in which (in the troubling words of Anthony Pagden) "the Spaniards defeat the Indians by means of signs." See Pagden's foreword to the 1999 University of Oklahoma edition of *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other,* xi.

Instead of pursuing an analysis that attempts to contrast European representations with historical colonial experience on the ground (a daunting task for any historian), I will present an intellectual/literary history in which the genealogy of a few specific New World tropes is defined within a broader European travel thematics. Throughout the course of this exploration, I will emphasize the ways in which the indigenous body (both individually and collectively) operated as a mirroring site from which a very specific strain of social critique drew its inspiration. Unlike previous literary and intellectual studies detailing New World encounter, the majority of which attempt to trace the impact of European depictions on the American colonial experience, I will chart the development of an assortment of images as they relate to a more confined (though nevertheless profound) late-Renaissance rupture in which ideas of space, distance, and cultural disparity were all radically refigured.

Assembling Caliban: The exhaustion of a literary theme

If Shakespeare's Caliban functions in the title, it is because his appearance on the London stage in 1611 marks the irruption of an essential breach. As a piece of character satire, Caliban is brilliant, as an expression of early modern sentiment, he is more troubling. Unlike the monsters and prodigies of the proceeding generation, Caliban appears in the text of *The Tempest* listless and uninspired. Described in the stage directions as a "salvage and deformed slave," no real sense of wonder or curiosity marks his arrival. The character is neither real threat nor portent, just a loosely cobbled signifier pointing ambivalently in multiple directions toward America, Africa, and the general Orient. Unlike his late sixteenth-century predecessors, his body says nothing about the greater destiny of humanity or the limitless scope of divine creation, and the two characters in the play most interested in his preservation are motivated by finance not curiosity. Upon encountering Caliban's aggregate

body of marine, reptilian, and human parts, the drunken butler Stephano announces: "If I can recover him, and keep him tame… he's a present for any emperor that ever trod on neat's leather," and his coconspirator Trinculo makes the oft repeated mark about the price of a dead Indian in London.[34] Caliban then is "a strange beast, to make a man," an oddity worth seeing perhaps, but nothing more back in Europe than another entry in a tired economy of hackneyed wonders.

Certainly, Shakespeare's final artistic statement is a work full of marvel and awe, but none of it directed or stemming from the character Caliban. In a momentous act of thematic inversion, Prospero's daughter Miranda, stranded for the majority of her young life on an island ripped from anywhere but the Mediterranean, delivers her famous line "O, wonder! How many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world that has such people in't," yet the foreign bodies provoking her statement are not foreign but uncannily European.

The Tempest announces a profound moment in early modern history. Since the late thirteenth century, Western European literature had been pushing the scope of its ethno-geographic queries farther and farther out along the peripheries of the known. Wildly popular texts like Marco Polo's *Divisament* or the collected stories contained in *Mandeville's Travels* had thrust their narrators well beyond the geographic and cultural borders of Europe in pursuit of amusing tales of the grotesque and miraculous. At the turn of the sixteenth century, accounts of New World exploration compiled in Peter Martyr's ubiquitous *Decades* had been eagerly devoured by the public. Forty years later, Hans Staden's *Warhaftige Historia*, with its tales of horror and histrionic descriptions of the "Cannibal Other," had exploded all over

[34] I quote from Stephen Orgel's 1987 Oxford edition of the play.

North Western Europe. Yet *The Tempest* unfolds in the Mediterranean, the most familiar of familiar locales. Its monster is pathetically impotent, able to inspire neither awe nor fear, just annoyance and perplexity. Its only wondrous bodies are European bodies, and its protagonist renounces his books to retire quietly to Naples. Don Quixote, a contemporary protagonist who similarly renounces his books after some 800 plus pages of adventuring solely within a single Iberian province also bears mentioning. Suddenly, at the turn of the seventeenth century, European heroes retreated back to the continent.

How should such a retreat be contextualized? Obviously, authors like Cervantes and Shakespeare did not put an end to the European fascination with travel and encounter. Adventure narratives remained and continue to remain wildly popular, but why are two of the most significant works of early seventeenth-century literature hermetically bound in Europe and populated by villains who are hopelessly defanged or else entirely illusory? It is my belief that the late Renaissance, after exhausting a fascination with strange and foreign bodies, underwent a brief yet highly productive moment of decompression in which a tired theme was satirically dissected.

Travelling towards mythic bodies, perhaps the most dominant mode of Western narrative emplotment so far, had been exhausted. The values expressed in older depictions of adventure had to be properly refigured to meet the expectations of an audience jaded by their rehearsal. Travel would quickly return as a theme to be realized in the work of Diderot, Defoe, Swift, and others, but it would no longer be conducted within the same cultural terms. Motivations such as heroic realization and religious awakening would be gradually supplanted by those of national, economic, or scientific obligation. It would be a mistake to perceive this shift in outbound motivations purely as one of the first visible expressions of

the embryonic state. Instead, it is more useful to consider such a thematic adjustment one of the many interrelated conditions that contributed to the rhetoric *facilitating* early statehood. If we accept Thomas Kuhn's assertion that science and cultural values are inextricably wound, then it seems right to produce a history that turns its eye on the myriad ways in which politics, ethics, science, economics, and religion function aesthetically. For if a rhetorical move is to be successful—particularly one as complicated as the move towards statehood—it must ably strike all salient cultural tones; and if we are to assume that strong artists are more equipped to read and reflect social moods, then Cervantes and Shakespeare, the two most representative artists of the late Renaissance, seem to indicate that previous modes of rhetorical expression: pietism, heroism, and the imaginative capital of the sublime, were no longer functioning at the turn of the seventeenth century.

It is not my goal here to trace the entire history of this literary process, but it is rather to examine the role played in its development by America and all its mythic bodies. Initially, when this analysis was envisioned as a broader exploration of sixteenth-century scientific trends, I had entitled this thesis "Dissecting Caliban." Only later did I realize the inherent problems with this initial title. Dissection assumes some kind of death (at least in the best circumstances), yet Caliban remains one of the most lively contested figures in Western literature. Even if the debate swirling around the nature of his appearance came to an end—thus effectively killing the character—who could procure the "right" body, for Caliban is composed of a multitude of bodies. It quickly became clear that the character and the Late-Renaissance tropology he represents could not be the subject of any cool and methodical analysis. Instead, the metaphors he contains can simply be traced, hesitantly so, throughout the cultural space of the sixteenth-century Atlantic.

Chapter Breakdown

What follows is a broad ranging exploration of European literary and artistic depictions of foreign bodies. While the main objective of this thesis is to emphasize France's unique contribution to wider sixteenth-century European discussions of American peoples, attention will also be paid to certain relevant antecedent and parallel discourses in an attempt to better culturally contextualize French perceptions of the New World. In its entirety, this study represents a modest entry in a growing field of comparative scholarship seeking to delineate the creation of a body of knowledge sparked by the discovery of the Americas.[35]

As of 2010, there has been no definitive call for an examination of the early modern period utilizing an "Atlantic World" or "transatlantic" paradigm.[36] Nevertheless, since the early 1990s, there has been a steady stream of literature attempting to compare and contrast both distinct colonial experiences in the Americas as well as various European bound discussions of the New World. As previously stated, the tendency to conflate these two distinctions (i.e. actual colonial experience and the rarefied intellectual framing of this experience back in Europe) has been quite frequent. However, this is not to suggest that the distinction has not been ably defined and managed in previous scholarship.

As early as 1982, Anthony Pagden defined a number of critical epistemological (and methodological) problems associated with the creation and dissemination of elite discourse.

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[35] Many of the newest entries in this scholarship shall be discussed within the upcoming pages.

[36] So far, the most convincing attempt to reposition discussions of Hispanic and English colony within a broader Atlantic paradigm has been made by Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra who feels that Iberian colonial and intellectual history has been unfairly segregated from broader discussions of European colonization. It is my opinion that a similar case can be made for early French colonial activity, particularly in South America, where most of the existing scholarship has remained hermetically French (i.e. produced by French scholars for French audiences without being incorporated into a broader comparative colonial framework). For more from Cañizares-Esguerra, see *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic 1550-1700* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); as well as an edited volume with Erik Seeman, *The Atlantic in World History: 1500-2000* (New York: Prentice Hall, 2006).

Pagden's most useful contribution was his emphasis on the difference between sixteenth-century spheres of experience (the actual colonial project taking place on the ground in the Americas) and sixteenth-century spheres of knowledge creation (the rarefied and often milieu-specific contextualization of this experience). Much like Pagden's pioneering work, this study will also focus on a rarefied series of discourses and the documents associated with their dissemination (i.e. travel narratives, cosmographies, literary texts, woodcuts etc.). However, unlike Pagden's admirable localized study, this study attempts to contextualize the work of several important French commentators—Andre Thevet, Jean de Léry, Michel de Montaigne—within a wider European intellectual tradition devoted to the description of foreign bodies.

Chapter 1, which has just been presented, lays out a general historic and historiographic framework for the rest of this study. Besides presenting the narrative of the French project at Guanabara, it also presents a brief discussion of European Renaissance trends that helps better discursively situate many of the depictions provided by the colony's participants. In regards to the historiography that has so far engaged many of these depictions (as well as depictions coming from Iberia, England, and the rest of Europe), the chapter argues against a purely post-colonial—and therefore conquest driven—interpretation of descriptions of difference; instead, suggesting that French (and more broadly European) depictions of Americans were often the product of a variety of culturally specific and aesthetically charged debates surrounding alien bodies. Ultimately, a significant shift in

literary presentations of otherness is pinpointed in Antarctic France and perceived crystallizing somewhat paradoxically in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.[37]

Chapter 2 presents an exploration of a select set of what might be thought of as antecedent literary sources that inform many of the earliest descriptions of the New World. In this sense, one can detect a thematic tradition of describing foreign bodies that begins with Marco Polo and persists well into the middle of the sixteenth-century (a tradition that this thesis perceives as being significantly refigured by Jean de Léry). As will be shown, many of the themes utilized in the earliest descriptions of the Americas: cannibals, paradise, communism, and sexual liberty, are not entirely original, but are characteristic of a much older European travel literature. This chapter proves useful because it provides a close reading of several major texts that are generally associated with New World discovery but rarely pursued in detail. So far, early depictions of dog-headed cannibals, giants, amazons, and pygmies in the Americas have been widely explained in political terms. However, this chapter suggests, that while certainly political, many of these depictions were culled from (and in conformity with) a much older collection of travel narratives.

Chapter 3, the longest chapter in this thesis, makes a case for an "American body,"—a frequently recurring set of traits and behaviors associated with the inhabitants of the New World (as I will emphasize, there is no one definitive description of this body, but there are repetitive and dominant characteristics that can be seen mutating over time). The earliest and most disseminated descriptions of the Americas before 1520—those provided by Columbus, Vespucci, and Peter Martyr—overwhelmingly tend to echo pre-existing European travel narratives. Thus, tales of cannibalism, hyper-sexuality, communism, and violence—all

[37] The well-established inter-textual connection between Jean de Lery, Montaigne, and The Tempest will be explained in chapters 4 and 5.

themes that many conquest-focused scholars have cited as colonial propaganda—can be, quite literally, recontextualized. What is presented then is a *myth* of an American body, one recognizing many of the same tropes as previous scholarship, but one complicated by a greater awareness of preexisting European images. After a general exploration of many of these tropes, an in-depth chronological examination of their French deployment is presented. The dimensions of a uniquely French "American Body" having been traced, it is possible to observe how it is then radically refigured with the 1578 appearance of Jean de Léry's *Histoire du une Voyage faict en la terre de Brasil.*

Chapter 4 is a deep reading of both Jean de Léry's *Histoire* (1578) and Montaigne's essay "Des Cannibales" (1580). A close comparison of the texts reveals not only thematic affinity, but a critical series of interrelated thematic disruptions that dynamically altered French understandings of native peoples. While Léry's voyager narrative represents a seminal entry in European ethnography, Montaigne's essay stands as a masterful refiguring of the cannibal trope. Unlike the majority of previous commentators of the Americas, both authors go to great lengths to juxtapose the "robust" American physical body with the "degenerate" social body of Europe. Both texts would ultimately dramatically influence the course of French literature, impacting not only the way cultural difference was depicted (in Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bouganville,* for example) but also how it was interpolated (in Rousseau's career long fascination with "natural man," for instance).

Chapter 5 presents both a conclusion and an epilogue in which the sixteenth-century theme of the American body is pursued into the early 1600s, at which point it is again re-imagined with the appearance of the character Caliban. Although an English text, French conceptions of native bodies, particularly those distilled in Montaigne's "Des Cannibales,"

are thoroughly evident throughout *The Tempest* (a connection that has been a long source of interest for Shakespeare scholars). In the 1960s, Foucault identified what he considered an essential break in Western thought in which a previous epistemological reliance on canonical textual authority shifted to the authority of empirical evidence, a break which he famously and quite poetically demonstrated with his discussion of *Don Quixote* in *The Order of Things*. While not intimately connected to Cervante's novel, it is my contention that *The Tempest* might be examined as yet another literary indication of a profound shift in the general mechanics of European knowledge creation, for in *The Tempest*, the ethnographically reflective presence of the foreign body first suggested by Léry and Montaigne is pursued to its logical conclusion: the literary declaration of a specifically European body.

Certainly, there are multiple interrelated arguments being worked out across all five chapters of this thesis; however, it is ultimately my aim to reveal the historical progression of a literary travel thematics observable in major European texts from Polo's *Divisament* to Shakespeare's *The Tempest.* In revealing common themes and recurring tropes, it is possible to better contextualize a wide variety of sixteenth-century descriptions of America. In directing special focus on a series of select French texts, it is possible to locate both culturally specific and transcultural literary figurations while also highlighting France's unique contribution to early modern understandings of the New World. What follows is a broad-ranging and eclectic synthetic study with the goal of drawing out some significant literary and cultural connections that have so far gone underexplored.

Chapter 2

Before America: The Travel Literature of Polo, "Mandeville" and the Missisonaries

Writing in the late twelfth century, archdeacon of Brecon Gerald of Wales issued an apology for the edge of the Western world. As everyone knew, the great wanderers of history had stumbled upon all of their best marvels in the East. It was in the Levant, Persia, India and the rumored lands beyond where Alexander staged his perpetual romance—a familiar and plastic journey malleable to the needs and tastes of each successive generation of medieval poets.[38] All the strange bodies and terrible works of nature collected in these minor epics had invested the East with a tremendous amount of imaginative capital. Nevertheless, Gerald realized that Ireland—the focus of his *Topographia Hiberniae*—was also a place of magic which deserved careful description. In his preface, he lays out his case:

> Just as the countries of the East are remarkable and distinguished for certain prodigies peculiar and native to themselves, so the boundaries of the West also are made remarkable by their own wonders of Nature. For sometimes tired, as it were, of the true and the serious, she draws aside and goes away, and in these remote parts indulges herself in these secret and distant freaks.[39]

Strange how nature works for Gerald. Much like a poet bored with civilization, she escapes to the borders to figure new creatures; delighting in the same terrors and transformations that agitate the verses of good epic. The irony of the parallel suggests an amusing teleology, for if

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[38] See *The Medieval Alexander Legend and Romance Epics: Essays in Honor of David J.A. Ross* ed. Peter Noble, Lucie Polak, Claire Isoz (London: Krauss International Publications, 1982). Gerrit H.V. Blunt, *Alexander the Great in the Literature of Medieval Britain* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1994). Andrew Runni Anderson's study *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Enclosed Nations* (Cambridge, Mass: Medieval Academy of America, 1932).

[39] I quote her from John J. O'Meara's admirable English translation, *The History and Topography of Ireland* (London: Dungalgan Press, 1951), 1.

the poets didn't exactly invent nature, then they were certainly responsible for the existence of a good number of those "secret and distant freaks."[40]

Imagining strange bodies: Paradoxography and myth

Since Antiquity, thinkers have commented on all the peculiar ways in which bodies on the geographic margins tend to warp and deviate from the physical norms of the known world.[41] The proclivity of classical and medieval authors to locate fantastically proportioned flora and fauna on the outside edge of the map is well-established, and scholars—both contemporary and ancient—have long been aware of the correlation between geography and marvel.[42] When Gerald of Wales presented his topography of Ireland, he was playing on a

[40] For a fascinating discussion of Gerald's extensive ruminations on the nature of physical, spiritual, and cultural boundaries, one is referred to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's "Hybrids, Monsters, and Borderlands: The Bodies of Gerald of Wales" in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages,* ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

[41] In many ways, descriptions of these bodily deviations—apparent in pre-modern travel narratives from Herodotus to Mandeville—prove difficult to gather below one contemporary umbrella term. Scholars have applied the familiar words monstrous, marvelous, and fantastic, and surely other far more pretentious labels could be imagined (the "disproportionately sublime," "corporal hyperbole," the "liminally grotesque"). Unfortunately, it is my sense that the "mythic body," falls more in line with the latter collection of signifiers. However, I believe that it is ultimately a more useful concept because it lacks the complex and oftentimes negative connotations of words like monstrous or grotesque. Certainly, some ancient and medieval authors did, in fact, intend to conjure feelings of fear, loathing, and disgust with their descriptions of foreigners, but many did not. Likewise, I believe the concept of "mythic bodies" (regardless of being slightly pompous in its own right) avoids some of the academic sensationalism associated with the "Monstrous" writ large.

[42] The examination of medieval cultural ideas concerning communal boundaries, cultural difference, and the wondrous/monstrous has exploded since the early 1980s. On the relationship existing between the monstrous and the periphery see John Block Friedman's foundational study *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981). For an examination of perceptions of geography, nature and the miraculous, see Daston and Park *Wonders and the Orders of Nature*; more specifically, the first chapter of the book "The Topography of Wonder." For more general discussions of mythic bodies in the pre-Modern period, see the essays collected in *The Monstrous Middle Ages,* ed. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003). For a more philosophic consideration of "alien construction" and the function of allegorical monstrosity see Richard Kierney's *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Interpreting otherness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); one is also referred to Julia Kristeva's famous discussion of abjection and otherness, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). For a more eclectic borderlands/comp. lit. project detailing the idea of cultural space and monstrosity, see *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Cohen's landmark introductory essay to the volume "Monster Culture: Seven Theses" is particularly relevant to my current analysis. Not only does Cohen provide a "usefully diffuse" theoretic apparatus from which to better understand depictions of alterior bodies, he also succeeds in meshing a series of historic texts with current cultural trends—the result is a tight rumination that is as engaging as it is insightful.

common theme, one that was both politically efficacious and aesthetically appropriate. Since the beginning of written Western history, writers have repeatedly observed strange things in the distance.

Herodotus, to begin with the most obvious example, wrote in the fifth century B.C. concerning the dog-sized ants then rumored to be digging gold for the people of India, noting "it seems as if the extreme regions of the earth were blessed with the most excellent productions."[43] Likewise, it was in alien places like North Africa, the Levant, and the greater "Orient" that Pliny located the monstrous races detailed in his massive first century encyclopedia *Naturalis Historia*. In the Middle Ages, the pseudo-Augustinian text *Ad Fratres in Eremo* describes certain men and women in Ethiopia having "no heads but with great eyes fixed in the chest and the other members similar to ours,"[44] The feelings of twelfth century clergyman Gerald of Wales have already been expressed—the opinions of others could fill a multivolume work. Throughout much of antiquity and almost all of the Middle Ages then, unexplored regions of the earth tended to house all the vestigial myths expelled from well-mapped and familiar spaces. The literature devoted to the description of marvelous phenomena, or the genre Classicists generally term paradoxography, is evident well into the Renaissance, and for centuries its influence crept into other genres less purely devoted to the strange and miraculous: epic, satire, hagiography, and of course travel narrative.

Indeed, one encounters mythic bodies in the Western Canon from its very inception. Obviously, the siege of Troy takes place across the Aegean on the shores of Ionia, and during the return back to Ithaca, Homer supplies a whole host of foreign oddities for which to maim,

[43] Herodotus, *The Histories*, III, 106.
[44] As quoted in John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races*, 60.

seduce, and confound his Odysseus.[45] The journeys contained in these first two epic poems would establish a theme echoed throughout much of European literature. While some, like Herodotus, often expressed their incredulity, others embraced the notion that the marvelous and malformed dwelt in lands beyond the Mediterranean world. The fifth-century *b.c.e.* Greek physician Ctesias provided the first fantastic travel report concerning his supposed journey to South Asia. Bodies from his *Indika*, now surviving in nothing but fragments, filtered down through the ages, echoed in the geographic explorations of later ancient and medieval writers.[46] Megasthenes, a fourth century Greek, who would also provide an account of his journey to the east, was similarly read and consulted.[47] However, as John Block Friedman notes in his pioneering study of monstrosity:

> Ctesias and Megasthenes belong less to the class of geographic writers than they do to that of the Hellenistic paradoxographers, whose rhetorically heightened descriptions of peoples and marvels in other lands are a distinctive product of the Greek Genius.[48]

While Pliny would later cement the status of all the mythic bodies produced by the Mediterranean imagination in the copious pages of his *Naturalis Historia*, the focus here is not on the history of the travel narrative and its function in the complex process of Premodern cultural othering, but rather on a thematic heritage specific to the sixteenth century. No doubt, a lengthy examination could be presented here attempting to catalog all the ways in which cultures, both categorically "Western" and "Non-Western," employ

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[45] For an interesting discussion of cultural difference in Homer, see Carol Dougherty, *The Raft of Odysseus: The Ethnographic Imagination of Homer's Odyssey* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001). Also, Alex Purves, "Unmarked Space: Odysseus and the Inland Journey" *Arethusa* by John Hopkins University Press, 39, 2006: 1-20.
[46] See J.M. Bigwood, "Ctesias' *Indica* and Photius," *Pheonix*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Winter, 1989): 302-316.
[47] See, A.B. Bosworth, "The Historical Setting of Megasthenes' *Indika*," *Classical Philology*, Vol. 91, No. 2 (Apr., 1996): 113-127.
[48] Friedman, *The Monstrous Races*, 6.

language to enhance and limit the possibilities of the foreign, but such an examination is far beyond the scope of this project. Rather than trace a history "from Enkidu to *Alien,*" I will focus specifically on a couple of key texts that would dramatically impact the perceptions of sixteenth-century voyagers. Thus, keeping the early "armchair travel romances" of Ctesias and Megasthenes in mind, I turn my attention to the creations of a series of much later travel writers and quasi- paradoxographers; not necessarily in pursuit of monsters, but in pursuit of some of the thematic detours that would usher them into the sixteenth century.[49]

What will be presented is an exploration of several significant trends affecting the production of travel literature from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. All of the writing reviewed in this chapter is concerned with travelling eastward, and while some of these accounts are well-documented and culturally insightful, others are entirely imaginary. Two of the works discussed below—the *Divisament* of Marco Polo and the collected stories of *Mandeville's Travels*—were wildly popular in their time and would incredibly influence the perceptions of the early New World voyagers. However, the other text discussed, a remarkably detailed and ethnographically sensitive description provided by William of Rubruck detailing his travels amongst the Tatars, fell into obscurity almost immediately after it was written.[50] This account is not mined here for borrowed metaphors or recurrent trends, but is presented as a kind of sister text to Jean de Léry's *Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil* in the hope of illustrating the many rich possibilities supplied by "outlying" documents.

[49] The particular guise of these mythic bodies will be explored in the next chapter.
[50] I employ the more linguistically correct and culturally sensitive term Tatars in my own writing; however, the word Tartars remains in all quotations.

Missionaries: William of Rubruck in Asia

The thirteenth century witnessed the production of multiple travel accounts detailing journeys to the "Orient."[51] Of these narratives, Marco Polo's is no doubt the most famous, but others were also written. The Franciscan missionary William of Rubruck likewise journeyed into Asia and produced an incredibly detailed and nuanced report of his time among the Tatars for Louis IX. His work, stillborn when originally presented in 1258, has since been reclaimed and reassessed by scholars as one of the great travel narratives of the later Middle Ages. William, although less keenly aware of (or at least less concerned with) the literary potential of his report than some of his contemporaries, seems to have understood far better the shifting perimeters of cultural difference. Opening his preface with a quotation from Ecclesiastes, William writes

> 'he shall pass into the country of strange peoples; he shall try good and evil in all things.' This task I have accomplished, my lord King; but may it have been as a wise man and not as a fool. For many do what a wise man does, yet not in a wise manner but foolishly rather, and I fear I am one of them. But for all that, however I have

[51] The majority of these eastern accounts focused on the Levant and were spurred on by activities associated with the fifth crusade. Jacques de Vitry, for example, presented his *Historia Orientalis*, a history of both the Holy Land and the ascent of the Islamic powers. Yet others journeyed even farther eastward; beside William of Rubruck, friar Giovanni Di Plano Carpini also supplied an account of his travels throughout the Mongolian empire. Giovanni, less concerned about his own personal narrative or ethnographic description, instead provided Europe with his militarily focused *Liber Tartorum.* A good portion of the book's eight chapters deal with battle tactics and measures to be taken against potential incursion by Tatar forces. For more on Jaques de Vitry see Jessalynn Bird, "The *Historia Orientalis* of Jacques de Vitry: Visual and Written Commentaries as Evidence of a Text's Audience, Reception, and Utilization," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 20 (2003): 56-54. See also, Jessalynn Bird, "Crusade and Conversion After the Fourth Lateran Council (1215): Oliver of Paderborn's and James of Vitry's Missions to Muslims Reconsidered," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 21 (2004): 23-47.

> acted, as you told me, when I left you, to put in writing for you everything I saw among the Tartars.[52]

He would accomplish his goal in high style. Unlike the majority of his predecessors and contemporaries, William managed to produce a report relatively unburdened by the fantastic imagery inherited from more sensationalist narratives. He is certainly not a paradoxographer, and his interests—predominantly realist—are exceptional for his time. In so many ways, William's account of his mission among the Tatars is kindred to the *Histoire* produced by the aforementioned Calvinist pastor Jean de Léry: devote yet sophisticated; ambivalently curious; skeptical towards its position in the greater scheme of European discovery and so therefore all the more precise and personal in its descriptions. William, whose literary prowess far eclipses that of Marco Polo's coauthor Rustichello da Pisa, provides a meticulous portrait of Tatar daily life. Clothing, diet, hygiene, marriage, and burial are given their own brief yet thorough chapters, and William manages to provide information concerning not only the Tatars and the Khan, but of the small Nestorian and Saracen communities inhabiting a patent "borderlands space" were identities and doctrines moved fluidly according to politics and economy.

What principally marks William's report as unique is the level of personality that characterizes each chapter.[53] His is not a dead itinerary of routes, lists, and enumerations, but a highly individual account in which feelings of fear, impatience, hope and annoyance are all

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[52] I quote from the most recent critical edition compiled by Peter Jackson and David Morgan, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the court of the Great Khan Mongke 1253-1255* (Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing Company, 2009), 59.

[53] In her excellent *Witness and the Other World*, Mary B. Campbell considers the personality of the text its most "revolutionary aspect." She continues, "In William we have finally found a traveler-author who speaks in his own voice, from his own real position in the practical world. He neither submerges nor exalts himself, is neither invisible nor polemical. And his full presence in the account of the journey allows us something Marco's text cannot: a sense of what it would be like to travel in the East." *The Witness and the Other World Exotic European Travel Writing*, 400-1600 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 113.

equally voiced ("that morning the tips of my toes froze, with the result that I could no longer go around barefoot"). In one particularly confessional entry, William relates the difficulty of his mission in the face of the poverty surrounding him and his party:

> Such was our diet, and it would have been quite adequate for us had we been allowed to eat undisturbed. But there are so many starving people who are not provided with food, and the instant they saw us preparing a meal they would crowd in upon us and we had to share it with them. It was there that I experienced what a martyrdom it is, when destitute, to give bountifully.[54]

Such a poignantly personal admission will not be found in Polo, neither in the more literarily charged accounts provided a century later. Contemporary churchmen were equally unlikely to present such highly specific descriptions. The itineraries of Gerald of Wales, produced just fifty years earlier, are replete with stories of whirlpools, werewolves, and the numerous and terrible hybrid offspring of all kinds of "unnatural couplings."[55] Friar Giovanni del Carpini, who also traveled into Tartar territory and wrote his mechanical *Historia Mongalorium* just eight years before William produced his own report, is far less concerned about matters of ethnography and far more concerned with matters of defense (chapters in Carpini's Historia are graced with such subtitles as, "How to wage war against the Mongols," and "How they Besiege forts, and their treachery to those who Surrender"). William's chapters, however, are devoted to the making of native beverages, personal adornment, the gendered distribution of daily chores, and the ritual treatment of the sick.

Of course, it would be a mistake to view William as some temporally displaced late nineteenth-century ethnographer—his prejudices run too deep, and his perception of those he

[54] *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 188.
[55] See again, Cohen, "Hybrids, Monsters, Borderlands: The Bodies of Gerald of Wales."

surveys, though insightful and reflexive, is predominantly negative. However, there is something extraordinary (in the very literal sense of that term) about William's report to Louis IX, even if it had minimal impact on the development of Western travel literature. Unlike Polo's *Divisament*, William of Rubrick's work never circulated Europe, it served its function as political report and then disappeared. The only significant contribution the account seems to have made to the development of Western knowledge are those geographic sections that Roger of Bacon later pillaged for his *Opus Maius.* Today, only five manuscripts of the report exist in England, none of which appears to have been significantly altered from the original.[56]

If William's account is presented in this study—an examination primarily concerned with thematic influence—it is due to the historical insight often generated by "outlying" texts. William's report serves as an excellent foil to the book produced by Polo and Rustichello just decades later, and it also works to dispel the idea that all medieval writers were fixated on mythic bodies. Presenting the text first no doubt undercuts some of the force of this chapters dominant argument (the cultural currency of the geographically distant), yet it supports a corollary position to be presented later. A link between William of Rubruck and Jean de Léry has already been posited, and while it does not serve the progress of this chapter to explore the link further, it bears noting that certain peculiar texts can work against cultural trends and defy historical expectations. William's work, unique in its time, was prematurely silenced by disinterest. The book to be explored below, far inferior in terms of its literary and ethnographical merits, but remarkable in its own right, proved unprecedented in its

[56] For more on the late medieval history (or relative lack thereof) surrounding William's report, see Peter Jackson and David Morgan's introduction to the 1990 Hakluyt Society critical edition, recently republished by Hackett Publishing Company (Cambridge, 2009), 47-55.

popularity. To the extent that William of Rubruck failed to connect with the European textual imagination, Marco Polo succeeded. Of the thirteenth-century journeyers, perhaps Marco Polo is the only one who deserves the title paradoxographer—a strange assessment to be sure, for his book contains far fewer phenomenal descriptions, and his mythic bodies are generally less outrageous. Yet his work offered his cultural world something entirely novel. Unlike his predecessors—who supplied their audiences with so many natural wonders and physical monstrosities—Polo's narrative equates marvel with number. If the book he produced had such a massive impact, it is due to the text's ability to incite curiosity, not with miraculously exaggerated physical proportions, but with hyperbolic sums (which are, in their own way, also bodies).

Suspension of disbelief: Approaching Polo within a Postcolonial discipline

We are not sure if Marco Polo ever entered China.[57] We do not know if he served in the court of the Great Khan. An original manuscript of his book, a work of numerous variant titles, does not exist. To date, his most meticulous and exhaustive annotators remain British imperialists. A worthwhile critical text of his *Divisament* has not been produced since 1938, yet a Penguin translation of his book can be found on most endcaps in the history section of any popular national book retailer. As source, Marco Polo is generally viewed by historians as fodder for amateur enthusiasts. As icon, he is armchair romance: his modern legacy perhaps owing more to Middle American swimming pools than the descriptions he provided of an "Orient" in which many of his contemporaries refused to believe. Needless to say, Marco Polo and his text are far from the minds of those occupying the vanguard of hip theoretico-historical scholarship.

[57] For competing views, see Frances Wood, *Did Marco Polo go to China?* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1995); John Larner, *Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

Making matters worse, the *Divisament* (the title adopted from here on out) is an inflated text: a work of potentially massive historical importance that promises much and delivers little.[58] It is a book poorly written, awkwardly organized, repetitive in its descriptions, and cloying when it tries to be provocative. Those interested in the book's historical insights have already dissected it repeatedly,[59] and those attracted to the work hoping to find some literary merit will, in all likelihood, be sorely disappointed. Thus, if the *Divisament* has been seemingly exhausted as historical source, it has failed to experience the afterlife that similar texts achieve in the hands of literary critics (*Mandeville's Travels*, a book to be explored shortly, serves as an excellent example of such critical resuscitation). As it stands, Polo scholarship has been ailing for the passed half century. Currently, the established secondary work on *The Travels,* Leonardo Olschki's *Marco Polo's Asia*, is now almost fifty years old.[60] Oddly, in an age of scholarship vocally critical of colonialism and its global legacy, the *Divisament* has been one of the few "Discovery" works left critically unmolested, almost as if a unanimous apathy had been agreed upon as punishment for its godfather status in the canon of imperial texts.[61]

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[58] A note on the title of the work: Marco Polo's book is referred to by a number of different titles, *Il Milione* (a reference to a family title) being perhaps the most frequently utilized in English discussions of the work. Similarly, *The Travels of Marco Polo* is a popular title likely to be employed for popular printings. However, the book was originally published in French under the title *Divisament dou monde* (*Description of the World*) or less commonly, *Livres des merveilles du monde* (*Books of Marvels of the World*). The abbreviated title *Divisament* is opted for here due to its fidelity to the original.

[59] See Colonel Henry Yule, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*. 3rd ed. Rev. Henri Cordier. (London: John Murray, 1921). Paul Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo* (Paris: Impr. Nationale, 1959).

[60] Leonardo Olschki, *Marco Polo's Asia*, (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960).

[61] Although neither postcolonial in its motivations nor theoretically oriented, a fascinating new reading of Marco Polo has been suggested in a recent essay by Ghang Zhou. Zhou argues that the narrative of Polo's text should be considered in relation to *small talk* "a genre of minor quasi-historic work in the Chinese narrative tradition." To my knowledge, this is one of the few attempts to comparatively examine Polo's narrative in regards to Eastern literary documents. Ghang Zhou "Small Talk: A New Reading of Marco Polo's *Il Milione*," *MLN* 124 (2009): 1-22.

Nevertheless, scholarly neglect always has the effect of engendering new reappraisals, and one will be attempted here. In many ways, if Marco Polo's work deserves reinvestigation, it is precisely because it lacks all of the seductive qualities that have subjected other contemporary travel narratives to so much recent scrutiny. Thus Marco Polo, dry and relentlessly boring as his text so often is, still has something to offer contemporary scholars because he remains relatively under-discussed; for reasons already presented above, but also perhaps because the *Divisament* is a work hostile to monster theorists. It is a book generally unconcerned with the grotesque and alien, and its foreign bodies are predominantly favorably described and unthreatening. Yet, closer inspection reveals other points of analysis valuable to those concerned with alterity as a historical concept.

To be fair, Polo's book is not entirely free of monstrous bodies. Human physical description, while not a dominant fascination, does occur. Most often, this description is positive and eroticized. The women of the Indian sea for example, are described as "brown-skinned and thin…very beautiful, with such a beauty as goes with a brown skin."[62] Presaging the highly sexualized preoccupation with body hair that will be encountered later in descriptions of the native peoples of Brazil and elsewhere in the New World, the women of Sinju province "have no hair on any part of the body except the head. They are very fair-complexioned with delicate flesh and their limbs are admirably proportioned."[63] Those in Africa fair worse in Polo's account, the inhabitants of Zanzibar, for example, are "horrible to look at. Anyone who saw them in another country would say that they were devils," the

[62] Because it is more fluid and avoids the unnecessary repetitions and awkward constructions of more literal translations, I quote from Ronald Latham's translation *The Travels* (New York: Penguin Books, 1958), 78. However, the most cited and consulted scholarly translation remains A.C. Moule and Paul Pelliot's *The description of the world* (London: G. Routledge, 1938); the edition represents a thorough distillation of multiple manuscripts and the critical annotation is admirably dense.
[63] Ibid., 105.

women of the isle are likewise described as "quite repulsive." All of which perhaps reinforces Christopher L. Millers assertion that Africa, not the Orient, served as Europe's most dependable "Other." [64] Nevertheless, what might today be perceived as racially partitioned desire is perhaps less complicated. Much like many other contemporary accounts, difference attributed to physical traits within the *Divisament* carries no real ethico-biological implications, for moral degeneration has yet to develop as a blanket explanation (or expression) of physical difference.[65] Elsewhere in the text, for example, is encountered the late medieval commonplace that what is physically prized is so only in relation to the eye of the beholder:

> I assure you that the darkest man is here the most highly esteemed and considered better than the others who are not so dark. Let me add that in very truth these people portray and depict their devils white as snow. For they say that God and all the saints are black and the devils are all white. That is why they portray them as I have described. And similarly they make the images of their idols all black.[66]

Compare this statement with the far more nuanced yet similar discussion of difference provided by Jacques de Vitry several generations prior:

> We know that all the works of God are marvelous, although those who are accustomed to look on them often are not moved by wonder. For perhaps the Cyclops, who all have one eye, marvel as much at those who have two eyes as we

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[64] Ibid., 301-302; Christopher L. Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985).

[65] This statement sadly precludes references to Semitic groups, who remained throughout much of the Middle Ages the prime target of the "polemic of difference," see David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[66] *The Travels*, 276. Note: despite utilizing the title *Divisament* within the text, I will cite *The Travels* in accordance with the guidelines spelled out in the Chicago Manual of Style (i.e. *Divisament* is not the title of the specific book from which I am quoting).

> marvel at them, or at others with three eyes. Just as we consider the pygmies dwarfs, so they would judge us giants…We consider the black Ethiopian ugly, but among them, the blackest is judged the most beautiful.[67]

Despite a few brief references to strange and terrible characters (cannibals, assassins, cynocephali), the *Divisament's* aesthetic politics do not often afford tales of marvels that are not likewise beautiful. Tartar bodies, described in the pages of Giovanni di Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck in predominantly negative terms, are treated far differently by Polo and Rustichello, both of who are heavily invested in all that their portraits convey. Great power, wealth, and influence must correspond to proper proportions and desirable features. The Great Khan, in accordance with his exalted position, is favorably described, "his limbs are well fleshed out and modeled in due proportion. His complexion is fair and ruddy like a rose, the eyes black and handsome, the nose shapely and set squarely in place."[68]

While certain familiar paradoxographical figures appear, they seem almost obligatory, and their treatment does not reveal an author primarily concerned with provocative and entertaining descriptions of physical phenomena. In a rare appearance of truly mythic bodies, men with tails, who appear suddenly alongside unicorns (perhaps rhinoceri?), are treated briefly and ambivalently. In another case, where a more imaginative writer would have encountered pygmies, the author ably parses and denounces a scenario in which small monkeys are shaved, bearded, and trained to act like men.[69]

Where the text is concerned with ethnography, it is generally in matters of marriage and sexual practice. Like so many European travel accounts generated in the New World, the

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[67] Quoted in Park and Daston, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 35.
[68] *The Travels*, 122.
[69] Ibid., 254..

sexual availability and erotic prowess of native women becomes a primary focus. In Sinju, men are "much addicted to sexual indulgence and take several wives since neither law nor custom forbids it."[70] In the province of Kaindu, men freely share their wives with visitors and passersby. Elsewhere, men prize only those women who have known an extensive number of lovers and are freely offered up to travelers. In this province, each woman is awarded a token from the man she lays with and the women with the most tokens is said to be "most favored by the gods," a "fine place to visit for a lad from sixteen to twenty-four."[71] However, there is little in the text to suggest that these accounts are generated by anything more than minor libidinal curiosity. Overall, presentations of sexual practice are relatively free of both sensationalism and moralizing and tend to prefigure the crude and literal New World descriptions of navigators and sailors far more than the broader metaphorical and theological discussions provided by priests and the educated.

In the text of the *Divisament*, Even the most taboo practices are presented relatively coolly. In one of the few instances of anthorpophagy recounted in the narrative, a relatively matter-of-fact description is accompanied by an uninspired yet rare instance of moral censure. In Dagroian, the body is eaten to prevent the dead from generating worms which would die off once the corpse was finished. In an attempt to "prevent the death of so many souls," the body must be consumed by the community. Apparently, perhaps having

[70] Ibid., 105.
[71] Ibid., 175-176. Linda Lomperis has rightfully noted that the text's many enthusiastic descriptions of the sexual availability of Eastern women "point away from the other and back to the scene of textual production." In other words, the descriptions provide by Polo and Rusticello are less denigrating to Eastern women (none of whom actually appear within the text in any recognizable way) and more reaffirming to a homosocial textual bond, both between the coauthors and the text's presumed male audience. Linda Lomperis, "Medieval Travel Writing and the Question of Race," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31:1 (Winter, 2001): 148-164.

inadvertently developed a taste for human flesh, this province of cannibals will seize, kill and devour passing strangers, "a very bad and detestable custom."[72]

Nevertheless, the *Divisament* proves a very unsatisfactory read for those digging for ethnohistory. Local explanations are taken at face value, and even the seemingly most bizarre foreign customs go unanalyzed. Markers of cultural difference lack hierarchy, either one is a Christian or one of the innumerable holdings of the Khan's mythic person, everyone else is "an idolater," or, at the most descriptive, "a Saracen dog." The *Divisament* yields few revealing cultural metaphors and presents no easily identifiable tropology of either the physical body or the cultural norms that fashion it. Similarly, it confounds common borderlands assumptions about violence and the margins. While epic and organized battles take place, the kinds of unregulated and symbolically charged bloodshed often associated with contested space is notably absent. Making the book even less appealing as an ethnographic document, there is no real deep social reflection beyond the repetitive observation that the Khan's realm produces *things* in unfathomable numbers. Natural wonders are of little concern because Polo's paradoxography is ultimately not driven by the need to define difference according to physical properties.

Instead, his text speaks to an entirely different historical impulse, namely the desire to economize difference. Polo's book is a merchant's mythology—his strangers are enumerated, and his mythic bodies are sums. Everywhere one encounters numbers: 200,000 horses, 100,000 cavalry, 2000 elephants, 15,000 boats, 100 tons of gold, 20,000 prostitutes, 300 miles per day. In his own time Polo was accounted a liar, today he is even more so. Yet, one cannot discount his numbers, for they function as the text's only real instance of linguistic

[72] *The Travels*., 255-256.

metaphor. Hyperbole and exaggeration, elsewhere in the canon of European travel narrative applied to physical bodies, is applied in the *Divisament* to their enumeration. What was ultimately produced by Polo and Rustichello da Pisa stands then as a kind of chimerical demography taking maniacal account of everything that Europe lacks.

If the figure of Kublai Khan presented in the *Divisament* is so relevant to this study, it is because the economic geography he embodies might be thought of as a precursor to that of the American body. In the chapter devoted to his person, the Khan is a symbol of abundance, fecundity, and sexual excess, a figure who operates beyond the bounds of Christendom and its hold on the moral imagination. The similarity posed between the figure of America and the Khan, however, should be understood as a matter of textual operation; to actually suggest that the Great Khan shares a more general connection within some type of universal semiotics would be to take a very unconvincing leap indeed. The Khan does not become America, nor does America reflect the mythology of the Khan, but it is certainly worth noting how more difficult and abstract conceptions of cultural distance often tend to become increasingly concentrated in a single easily recognizable figure. Just as Cathay and its environs are mythically tied to the body of the Khan within the text of the *Divisament*, so a similar process will occur as the Western hemisphere is slowly focused into more functional tropes operating throughout history (the Noble Savage, the Cannibal Queen, the Virgin West, Uncle Sam, the Big Satan etc.)[73]

Complimenting the impulse in the *Divisament* to enumerate, or perhaps stimulated by it, is the desire to catalog space, to chart each road and to map the distance between

[73] Most of these familiar tropes are associated with North America, particularly once the United States establishes itself as the dominant political and cultural force in the hemisphere. However, earlier personifications can be seen operating in the sixteenth-century (to be explored further on in Chapter 5).

locations—again, a merchant's mythology. However, one should be wary of too quickly asserting the utilitarian thrust of Polo's account, not because the *Divisament* was written for purely rhetorical or literary purposes (it is certainly a guide in the most mundane sense) but because all travel narratives, from the most ethnographically profound to the most empirically rigid, serve the aim of representation. The perceived correspondence to reality then is ultimately less interesting than the way the historical document deviates from expectations. Thus, Polo's book is a kind of broken economic atlas with all its measures and distances, but the way the text depicts the relationship between geography and humanity is more charged and perhaps the most interesting aspect of the entire document.

In one of the most famous of the books scattered marvelous tales, the Caliph of Bagdad, wishing to diminish the Christian presence in his realm, sets his advisors to work on a plan to persecute the community of believers (a community with which the authors of the text obviously sympathize). Eventually, the Caliph's Islamic advisors stumble upon the famous passage in the Gospels pertaining to the mustard seed grain of faith capable of moving mountains. Exploiting the passage, the Caliph assembles the Christians of his realm and challenges them to either move a nearby mountain or convert, those who refuse being subject to death. At the last moment, a pious shoemaker appears, the Christians (100,000 in number) assemble on the plain carrying the image of the cross, and a prayer is said which demolishes the mountain identified by the Caliph. The miracle produces a wave of Saracen converts and the Caliph himself is swayed, "but in secret; for when he died, a cross was found round his neck."[74] Here and elsewhere throughout the text, topography is literally moved or demolished in order to vindicate certain cultural assumptions.

[74] Ibid., 57.

In a similar instance, when the king of the province of Kerman expresses curiosity concerning the unruly nature of the nearby Persians (like those of the Islamic faith, also a common target of scorn within *The Travels*), his sages attribute the behavioral disparity to a "difference in soil." An experiment is then conducted in which seven ships are sent to Persia, filled with native earth, and then brought back to Kerman:

> this earth he ordered to be spread out like pitch over the floors of certain rooms and then covered with carpets, so that those who entered should not be dirtied by the soft surface. Then a banquet was served in these rooms, at which the guests had no sooner partaken of food than one began to round on another with opprobrious words and actions that soon led to blows. So the king agreed that the cause did indeed lie in the soil.[75]

Thus, geography establishes patterns of behavior. Climate too, can have similar effects. In Armenia, where the climate is unhealthy, the nobility of the country, "who used to be men of valour and stalwart soldiers, are now craven and mean-spirited and excel in nothing except drinking."[76] In India, horses transported into the hot climate cannot breed, and when rare births do occur the resulting offspring are "monstrosities, blemished and misshapen in their limbs and quite worthless."[77]

Yet, geography, such a crucial determinate of behavior, can be faked. In the "land of Islam," the Sheikh Alaodin, constructs a garden between two mountains filled with conduits of wine, milk and honey and stocked with fruit trees, virgins and palaces, here he places his drugged assassin recruits. When the young men awake, they "believe themselves in paradise,

[75] Ibid., 63.
[76] Ibid., 46.
[77] Ibid., 61.

according to the fashion that their prophet had declared."[78] These young men, desperate to return to the false paradise, will murder whomever the Sheikh desires. What is remarkable about all of the instances of geographic displacement, illusion, and demolition, is the fact that none of them take place in Cathay (the one region in the itinerary many scholars doubt the author actually visited). Thus, the Great Khan, whose territories can be demarcated and measured to infinity, remains undisturbed in all that he embodies.

It is not necessary to contend that the *Divisament* represents any kind of precursor literature to that which would later spring up around the concept of America—the differences between the two are stark and readily identifiable. Yet the book does represent perhaps the most thorough mythology organized around the principle of selling a foreign locale. While common tropes later expressed in descriptions of the New World exist (the sexually-charged female body, the fecundity of specific geography, the climatic determination of behavior), what is more important is the rhetorical framework with which these tropes are presented. The *Divisament* thus supplies a new way of thinking about alien places. Borders once mythologized in order to elaborate the value of cultural homogeny and the danger of difference are suddenly romanticized in a work that quickly established itself as the most important read in a rapidly expanding collection of literature detailing the Orient. Certainly, the *Divisament* was not the first work to direct its desire eastward, but it was the first to do so in such easily accessible, brochure-like fashion. Rhetorical presentation then is the *Divisament's* most significant contribution to later descriptions of the New World.

[78] Ibid., 43.

Mandeville's "Travels"

Nearly a century later, another wildly popular collection of travel stories swept across Europe in the form of *Mandeville's Travels*. Bizarre, rich, ambitious, and complex, perhaps no other work complicates our understanding of early modern travel literature more than Mandeville. Just when the success of Marco Polo's proto-bourgeois romance might have signaled a turn away from the grotesque and physically sensational, a collection of tales, initially published in French, appeared sometime around 1360.

Unlike William of Rubruck, who swiftly disappeared into historical anonymity, or Marco Polo, who more slowly disappeared within the construction of his own iconography, Sir John Mandeville probably never even existed.[79] Almost certainly, the text is a compilation of travel narratives written by others—individually compiled, yet collectively constructed. In the words of Ian Macleod Higgins, the *Mandeville*-author "is a fiction written into others' writings and sometimes depicted doing their deeds. The author is not so much dead, then, as deeply and probably irretrievably encrypted."[80] Of course, this is nothing strange; history is full of crypto-texts and pseudonymous authors. Few works, however, have been as regularly received, dismissed, and reassessed as *Mandeville's Travels*. As literature, the book is of secondary importance: kindred, but inferior to the work of Chaucer and Boccaccio. Yet what the book lacks in style, it makes up for in the bizarre composition of its substance. Few books have as many narrative colors, fewer still have as many variants.

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[79] For a discussion of the work's first person perspective and the "I" of John Mandeville (which Is a significant development for such works during this period), A.C. Spearing has recently provided a comparative examination in which he juxtaposes the "physical" journey contained within the Mandeville text to a spiritual allegory contained in the writings of hermit and Augustinian canon Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*. Spearing concludes that while the Mandeville author is less of a prose stylist, his work's liberal and personable narrator "invites the reader to participate in thought experiments without predetermined conclusions." A.C. Spearing, "The Journey to Jerusalem: Mandeville and Hilton" *Essays in Medieval Studies* 25 (2008): 1-14.

[80] Ian Macleod Higgins, *Writing East: The "Travels" of Sir John Mandeville*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) 8.

Mandeville's Travels represents what might be thought of as a "multi-text," with some 270 plus manuscripts in multiple languages scattered throughout Europe.[81] Perhaps it is fitting that a collection of imaginary travels would itself possess such an extensive itinerary as text.[82]

There are few "authors" that have had such an extensive and wide ranging impact as the compiler of *Mandeville*, and the narratives he assembled and disseminated throughout Europe seem to have profoundly affected the trajectory of travel literature.[83] Like *The Cantebury Tales* or *The Decameron*, *Mandeville's Travels* is also a book preoccupied with motion. While multiple new literary forms are being worked out in its pages (some more original than others), the work occupies itself with long familiar themes. The reader encounters the Iron Gate of Alexander, the accursed valley of Gog and Magog, the cynocephali, and the flesh eating Tibetans; one could almost suggest that Mandeville is less a late work of paradoxography and more of a creative synopsis of all of that genre's literary influence.[84] Thus, the strange and wondrous descriptions that worked their way out of the

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[81] Ibid., 17-25.

[82] Admittedly, what will be presented here is a "naïve reading" of the book. Only a handful of scholars can claim to be thoroughly familiar with the work and its multiple variants (many containing significant additions and omissions). Unlike the of book Marco Polo and Rustichello da Pisa, *Mandeville's Travels* is a work that has not been (and most likely could not be) melded into any one satisfying critical edition. As such, I rely heavily here upon the work's two most exhaustive critics, Josephine Waters Bennett and Ian Macleod Higgins. Josephine Waters Bennett, *The Rediscovery of Sir John Mandeville* (London: The Modern Language Association of America, Oxford University Press, 1954); Ian Macleod Higgins, *Writing East.* Macleod Higgins' study provides a chapter by chapter close reading of the work's multiple variants, while Waters Bennett's work focuses more upon the history of the text's critical, commercial, and cultural reception.

[83] Critic Benjamin Braude has called the book "the single most popular European work of secular literature in the late medieval early modern period." See his interesting analysis of early modern understandings of race in relation to Biblical scripture, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographic Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Period," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54.1 (1997): 103-142.

[84] The Gate of Alexander and Gog and Magog are both persistent themes throughout Medieval literature. The narrative is generally anti-Semitic in its relation, with a proto-Christian Alexander managing to contain an unruly population of demon worshiping Jews within a mountain pass. For more on this recurring theme, the reader is referred to Victor I. Scherb, "Assimilating Giants: The Appropriation of Gog and Magog in Medieval and Early Modern England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32:1 (Winter, 2002): 59-84. See

early paradoxographers and into the work of later poets, hagiographers, travel writers, and encyclopediasts, are channeled via the *Mandeville* author into one authoritative "multi-text." The author seems quite aware that he is conducting a synthesis:

> And therefore hath it befallen many tymes of o thing that I haue herd cownted whan I was yong, how a worthi man departed sometime from oure contrees for to go serche the world. And so he passed Ynde and the yles beyond Ynde where ben mo than v.m yles. And so longe he wente be see and lond and so enviround the world be many seisons, that he fond an yle where he herde speke his owne langage, callynge on oxen in the plowgh suche words as men speken to bestes in his owne contree; whereof he had gret meruayle, for he knew not how it myghte be. But I seye that he had gon so longe be londe and be see that he had envyround alle the erthe, that he was comen ayen envirounynge (that is to seye, goynge aboute) vnto his owne marches.[85]

This "going about unto his own marches,"—a statement ripe for interpretation, characterizes the entire work. After nearly two millennia of cycling through Mediterranean and Western European texts, all the mythic bodies of the canon are assembled by the Mandeville author in a totally fictional work that had no precedent to reveal it as such. Accordingly, the character Sir John Mandeville, serves as a kind of concentrated eyewitness capable of testifying to all biblical, classical, and folkloric mythologies. In a strange rhetorical twist illustrating the power of established images, Mandeville managed to eclipse Polo as the authority on all things Eastern by providing all the right unfamiliar bodies and thus fulfilling cultural expectations.

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also Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

[85] I cite here from the 1400 Cotton edition of the text republished in 1967 by Clarendon, *Mandeville's Travels* ed. M.C. Seymour, (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1967), 135.

As strange as it seems to the modern observer (especially to the historian trained to discard all fantastic elements within a document) it was precisely his "lies" that cemented the status of Sir John Mandeville as the most popular traveler of the Late Middle Ages. Thus we can see thematic familiarity as it functions in the political struggle waged amongst texts in order to be accepted as culturally relevant. These types of appeals to textual authority will be seen most explicitly in the narratives of the early New World voyagers, who would later replicate so many of the tropes exploited in *Mandeville.*[86]

If the book is a template, it is not an original one, at least in terms of its content. Its monsters are recognizable, its anecdotes predictable, and its ethos is decidedly Christian. If Marco Polo produced a surprisingly secular book, the Mandeville author far better reconciles his faith with the discussion of the East. Higgins goes so far as to suggest that the Mandeville text provides a kind of "corrective homage by bringing its material under the aegis of Christian History."[87] Before his armies subdued the greater portion of the Christian East, Mohammad, the author assures his readers, "was first a pore knaue that kepte cameles."[88] And unlike Polo, Mandeville procures the attention of his audience by doing due and detailed diligence to all the wonders of the Holy Land; his descriptions are as charming as they are productive: "And right nygh is the ston where oure lord often tyme sat vpon whan He

[86] So far, understandings of Mandeville's relation to New World discovery has been somewhat skewed; back-streaming a postcolonial understanding of "otherness" to a period when descriptions of physical difference was much less a ready tool of polemic than it ultimately became in the nineteenth century. Andrew Fleck, for example, writes, "hegemonic impulse-the desire to convert the rest of the world to the univocal truth-prepares the way for the imperial appropriation of cultures and peoples inaugurated a century later by Columbus and refined throughout the early modern period." While certain tropes can certainly be seen moderating between *Mandeville* and the letters and diaries of Columbus, to assert that Mandeville presages a later imperial program is to conflate the concept of the "Other" and to fundamentally misunderstand medieval perceptions of difference. Andrew Fleck, "Here, There, and In between: Representing difference in the Travels of Sir John Mandeville," Studies in Philology 97.4 (Autumn, 2000): 379-400.
[87] Higgins, *Writing East*, 52.
[88] *Mandeville's Travels*, 102.

prechede, and vpon that same He schalle sytte at the Day of Dome right as Himself seyde." This is just one of the many instances throughout Mandeville in which an immediate piece of geography is flung forward to remind the reader of a much broader Christian eschatology.

Despite the general good-natured relativism often attributed to Mandeville, it should be observed that many of the recycled narratives in his text rely far more heavily on divine explanations than elsewhere (Odoric of Pordeone for example). Whether this ultimately has to do with the greater level of detail inherent in Mandeville cannot be entirely determined, but such a focus on the divine seems to reaffirm old prejudices. For example, when Mandeville's Alexander claps Gog and Magog in between two mountains along with their community of Jewish followers, he does so with the help of a distinctly Christian deity: "he preyed to God of Nature that He wolde parforme that that he had begonne. And alle were it so that he was a payneme and not worthi to ben herd, yit God of His grace closed the mountaynes togydre."[89] A familiar tale from the Alexander Romances that exerted such great influence on the medieval imagination is thus made recognizable within the Christian tradition.

Accompanying Mandeville's reemphasis on the divine, is the return of so many of the monstrous characters haunting the works of earlier texts. These figures, while not entirely expelled from the narratives of the crusade centuries, had lost much of their currency as chroniclers shifted their expressions of wonder to the monuments of the Holy Land and their animosity toward the Saracen host stationed around Jerusalem. Perhaps because the Mandeville author was in all likelihood neither merchant nor crusader, he was able to turn European attention again towards physical anomaly. In one particular "Nota of a merueyle,"

[89] Ibid., 192.

his taste are almost anachronistic, as his fictional avatar moves through Egypt, he recounts the story of a hermit who once came upon a horned monster with "a body lyk a man vnto the navele, and benethe he hadde a body lyk a goot."[90] The monster, presaging the prodigies which would flourish at the end of the sixteenth century, does not attack, but rather asks the hermit to pray for him. The head, still equipped with the two horns, is kept at Alexandria as a miracle.

Effectively, nearly all of the expectations that a contemporary reader might have brought to the narrative are either fulfilled or surpassed. Familiar creatures are comfortably located in their usual places—Ethiopia still houses the one footed Sciopods, and the isle of ox worshiping Cynocephali (dog-headed peoples) is visited and described, while the Great Chan (provided with a confusing biblical genealogy) is safe in Cathay. In completist fashion, wonders on the borders of the Western world are pressed even farther out to the isles beyond the realms of China. The tree grown vegetable lamb (normally located in Scythia) makes an appearance, as does a vegetable variant on the famous barnacle goose of Ireland. Furthermore, the lost Christian kingdom of the fabled ruler Prester John is not only alluded to, but visited and fully described.

The origins of so many of these narratives are easily identified. Beyond Pliny's encyclopedia, the romances of Alexander, and the early paradoxographers, Mandeville borrows his material from a number of close sources. The compassionate cannibalism practiced by those afraid to harm worms engendered by corpses is culled from Marco Polo, while the "Valley Perilous" narrative in which the author travels through a horrific valley filled with sweet music and piles of corpses is ripped right out of the report of Friar Odoric of

[90] Ibid., 33.

Pordeone. However, all of these tales are sharpened in Mandeville. Unburdened by the task of establishing himself as a true pilgrim, the narrator becomes the ultimate pilgrim, encountering nearly everything that could possibly be imagined by someone living in the cultural arena of the late Middle Ages. Truth claims, associated after the early seventeenth century with the personal realism encountered in the neglected report of William of Rubruck, were ultimately far less important in the fourteenth century when compared to other rhetorical vehicles such as appropriate tone, familiar tropes, recognizable symbols, and authorial authority (the *knight* Sir John Mandeville proved more appealing than the *merchant* Marco Polo, or the humble *churchman* Friar Giovanni del Carpini).

If his work is critical to the overall development of this project, it is because his influence extended well into the "Age of Discovery," and the bodies he reestablished as relevant would eventually find their way into the reports produced by much later travelers. As Josephine Bennett so curiously remarked in 1954 concerning the book,

> It belongs primarily to the history of imaginative literature, where it has an important place; but it has a place also in the history of geographical discovery because it did much to disseminate, in popular and inviting form, the general fund of knowledge and belief which prepared the minds of men for great voyages.[91]

Perhaps more, the book prepared the broader textual landscape of Europe; reintroducing employable metaphors capable of handling the appearance of unfamiliar bodies. Beyond "luring" Columbus across the Atlantic, the text supplied a narrative into which the sudden discovery of the Americas could be easily worked. The world, according to the Mandeville author, was a strange and seemingly limitless place, and those dwelling in it

[91] Bennett, *The Rediscovery of Sir John Mandeville*, 1.

were marked by incredible diversity of both appearance and habit. Consider the description of the people of Lamary:

> In that londe is fulle gret hete. And the custom thre is such that men and women gon alle naked, and thei scornen whan thei seen ony strange folk goynge clothed…And thei wedden there no wyfes, for all the wommen there ben comoun and thei forsake no man…and all the lond is comoun, for alle that a man holdeth o yeer, another man hath it another yeer. And euery man taketh what part that him lyketh. And also alle the godes of the lond ben comoun, cornes and alle other thinges, for nothing there is kept in clos ne nothing ther is vndur lok. And euvery man there taketh what he wole withouten ony contradiccoun, and als riche is o man there as is another. But in that countree there is a cursed custom, for thei eten more gladly mannes flesch than ony other flesch…[92]

The similarity between this passage and the news issuing from Brazil throughout the sixteenth century is remarkable. Without aid of civilization, its mores or its technologies, a community of innocents achieves total social harmony, yet appears eerily compelled to quite literally devour itself. An anthropologist could certainly make an argument about the common global practices of "traditional societies," or the universal workings of the "savage mind;" suggesting that the encounter between civilization and those outside always operates according to familiar patterns. But that would be to fall back into the ancient narrative crafted by the paradoxographers and their literary descendents, into the narrative that circumscribes the authority of the polis by insisting on a select number of "fatal tradeoffs" existing between savagery and responsibility, chaos and organization, barbarism and obedience, the "raw," and

[92] *Mandeville's Travels*, 132.

the “cooked.” This is the narrative dichotomy that Montaigne would so masterly invert (but not escape) in his “Des Canibales,” the same dichotomy around which Levi-Strauss would construct an entire system of twentieth-century thought. To avoid being subject to the same perceptual rigidity, it is better to go about defining something else, patterns certainly, but not patterns of *encounter* suggested by the documents, rather patterns of *description* inherent in the very rhetorical presentation of those documents.

These patterns of rhetorical presentation, specifically those perceivable in New World voyager materials, were inherited and ultimately dictated by the precepts of a somewhat amorphous genre of literature which had developed over millennia of travelling towards the body, or more specifically, the seemingly infinite possible manifestations of the human form. By the turn of the seventeenth century, after more than a hundred years of reports from the New World, Asia, Africa and Australasia, European man was finally “going about unto his own marches.” The globe envisioned by Mandeville had finally been circumnavigated, and all that remained to be discovered was bound in the space of increasingly detailed maps. There was no longer a “land beyond which” to be imagined. Paradise, Mandeville’s ultimate destination, had already yielded up its cannibals and revealed itself as a place of terror and annunciation: terror because it confirmed so many of the myths of the outer darkness, annunciation because it proclaimed the end of the geographic border on which bodies could defy the limits of nature.

Yet this process was hardly immediate. A hundred years of extensive exploration and a far more articulate science were needed before any such pronunciations could be made. The wealth of descriptions supplied by the Renaissance navigators allowed Europe to truly reflect on a dominant thematic trend. Reality and fantasy, such clearly demarcated notions after the

Enlightenment, were defined in the late sixteenth century as an explosion of reports, accounts, treatise, and eyewitnesses appeared to attest what they had found, not only in the Americas, but all throughout the natural world. Testimonies were scrutinized, compared, compiled, and then much later sorted according to their veracity. The mythic body as it had existed in the works of the classical paradoxographers, the grotesques of the Middle Ages, and the expanding bestiaries of the early Modern would eventually be retired, but not before it could be refigured one last time in America.

Chapter 3

Some Notes Towards a Myth of the American Body

The Renaissance supplied history with a host of bodies. Corporal bodies, as in any age, appeared, performed, expired, and then decayed, but it is the imaginative trace of these bodies—inscribed upon so many of the cultural artifacts of sixteenth-century Europe—that inspired an ideological break with the past. During this time, the Natural world was gradually re-envisioned as textual authority increasingly came into conflict with practical experience.[93] The physical corpus—often described since Late Antiquity as husk, shell, vessel, even tomb—gained fresh metaphors, and more incisive anatomies suggested all the ways the body testified to broader creation. The concept of the microcosm flourished, and throughout the Renaissance it was widely thought that each individual could be seen functioning as an articulate link in the Great Chain of Being.[94] Mythic bodies, those "lost and distant freaks" housed at the edge of the world, were gradually superseded by the myth *of the body*, not as the complex biological organism much later perceived by nineteenth-century science, but as an engine that could be stripped and broken down into easily identifiable parts.[95]

As with any meaningful historical break, this shift in perceptions of the body was a process not a moment. Andreas Vesalius produced a detailed and remarkable medical anatomy only after artists like da Vinci, Raphael, and Dürer had re-imagined the physical

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[93] This rupture was summarized briefly in the introduction. For more, see Brian Oglive's excellent recent work *The Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe*. One is also encouraged to see Deborah E. Harkness' *The Jewel House: Elizabethan London and the Scientific Revolution.*

[94] See A.O. Lovejoy's foundational intellectual study, *The Great Chain of Being: The History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1936); and, of course, Michel Foucault's *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1966).

[95] The remarkably "partitioned" bodies appearing in Vesalius' *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543) are but one example of an explosion of anatomical texts appearing during this period. For more on this topic, see Katherine Park *Secrets of Women: gender, generation, and the origins of human dissection* (New York: Zone Books, distributed by MIT Press, 2006); also, Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the human body in Renaissance culture* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

ideal—not in the form of a two dimensional Christ broken on the cross, but as a densely textured emblem of veins, sinews, joints, and vertebrae. Of course, it is a mistake to confuse greater realism for progress, even if the conceptual body towards which the sixteenth century was moving more resembles that of our own. Ultimately, we are still dealing with representations, not people; ideas, not human beings; traces, not realities. While the conceptual body can be captured, presented and possessed—in marble, charcoal, watercolor, wood, oil, or script—the physical body remains more aloof. Indeed, the human remains tagged and cataloged by forensic anthropologists ultimately tell us less about the dynamics of social history and more about the accidental preservation of its detritus. As such, whenever we speak of historical bodies, we are, in a curious way, speaking of mythologies.

The mythology of the Renaissance body is perhaps the most enduring of the periods many contributions to human culture. It is a mythology that has been religiously preserved, meticulously parsed, politically exploited, and endlessly parodied. A small but significant component of this mythology will be explored below, namely the concept of the American body. Admittedly, it is an awkward and confusing subplot in the existing Renaissance narrative of creativity; lacking both a singular trajectory and a clear overarching moral. Making matters worse, it is a piece of apocrypha—acknowledged yet relatively unintegrated into a broader European aesthetic history. As a result, much of the insight contained in the first depictions of the New World has been generally taken for granted. While those concerned with the literary history of colonialism in America have supplied explanations, the vast majority have been tethered to a narrative of conquest and colony. Predictably, early

representations of American bodies have been widely interpreted politically.[96] Such interpretations, while entirely valid and certainly justified, have sometimes obscured the complex semiotic impulse underlying broader European discussions of the "American Other."

However, such politically focused inquiry is not without merit, and this essay also assumes that every symbolic gesture is performed according to the dictates of a culturally salient rhetoric. Unfortunately, rhetoric is all too often oversimplified as politic, forgetting that the division of political and aesthetic interests is predominantly arbitrary (and generally unhelpful). Such a conceptual segregation can sometimes result in a "sanitized" understanding of human motivation that forgets that political capital is only obtainable (and deployable) within a fluctuating nexus of cultural values. Accordingly, the goal here is not to deny the political impetus behind European representations of indigenous America, but to suggest that politics and aesthetics must be explored in tandem. Because history is a metonymic process that must content itself with traces, a mythology is presented here in an attempt to avoid equating mimetic fictions with historical realities.[97]

What follows is a brief synopsis of a century's worth of American depictions; more specifically, Brazil's disproportionately large contribution to this small but significant canon of imagery. Historical psychoanalysis, while always interesting, will be bypassed in order to avoid an over-determined and presumptuous reading of the source material.[98] Instead, a

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[96] Anthony Pagden's *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the origins of comparative ethnography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Tzvetan Todorov, *La conquete de l'Amerique : la question de l'autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1982). Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of possession in Europe's conquest of the New World* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Jorge Cañizares-Esquerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

[98] See Todorov, *The Conquest of America.*

tropology will be charted to locate and compare common metaphors and reoccurring images. This exploration will suggest the multiple ways the American body functioned within a broader Renaissance aesthetics.

Methodology and concept

There are so many well worn *topoi* associated with the New World: the savage, the cannibal, the Indian, the Native, does it really serve to introduce yet another conceptual model of indigenous identity? Perhaps. But the idea of the American body proposed here is not a conceptual model devoted to indigenous identity, but rather a conceptual models devoted to European *representations* and untethered to the reality of indigenous *experience*. This is not an attempt to deny that genuine historical encounters informed the earliest depictions of the New World (they most certainly did), but to emphasize the European construction of the earliest "discovery" documents and the problems inherently associated with such a skewed base of source material. Accordingly, the American body can only be understood as a cluster of interrelated ideas associated within an imagined geography (corporal, topographical, and metaphorical).

The inevitable criticisms are certainly justified. Of course, it is always dangerous to assert the agency of a historical fiction above the agency of the historical subject who inspired that fiction. There is likewise the risk of duplicating the error of the source material itself; reducing historical realities to useful metaphors and tropes in order to rhetorically advance an argument (in this case, a thesis). However, it is my belief that the alternative can be equally harmful. By digging for indigenous realities in European depictions—particularly without recourse to solid archaeological and ethnographical data—one runs the risk of

producing a history that is either naïvely optimistic (in the best case) or histrionically patronizing (in the worst).

It is ultimately a question of the limits with which we are comfortable circumscribing our histories. Certainly, there is something initially frustrating (even demoralizing) in the admission that certain historical encounters cannot be salvaged (at least in any empirical sense), but such admissions engender responsible histories. It is not my argument that the sixteenth-century native experience is forever lost, but rather, that it is obscured where diverse source materials cannot be compared and corroborated. As tempting as it is to go about constructing an ethnohistory with early and isolated "discovery" documents, this process is wildly speculative and epistemologically problematic. Obviously, one does not go about tracing a history of first century Judeo-Palestine with the information contained in the Gospels, nor should one attempt to construct the history of Yuan dynasty China according to the *Divisament.* No doubt, the historical Christ was part of the Jewish community, and Marco Polo probably encountered Mongols, but to claim any real narrative parity within such sources would be absurd. Admittedly, the New World documents are perhaps more historically suggestive than the previous two examples, but the danger remains the same. A Judeo-Roman juridical history according to the Passion of Matthew is inevitably a history of violently skewed representations, as is a Tupinamba history according to the Franciscan André Thevet. As such, the existing narrative of the earliest New World encounters is doomed to continually replicate defeatist histories (or worse, patronizing histories of "resistance" in which occasionally positive descriptions provided by otherwise hostile European chroniclers are cobbled together to present the "Native point of view").

Nevertheless, these documents—the earliest chronicles, correspondence, woodcuts, journals, and cosmographies—are far from historically worthless, in fact, they possess significant historical insight, not in terms of the realities they claim to depict, but in terms of the salient cultural narratives they echo and augment. Thus, a hermeneutics is suggested, a comparative aesthetic analysis that attempts to better situate New World encounter within the developing history of European travel thematics. Here, a comfortably pessimistic *literary exploration* is preferred above an overly optimistic *empirical analysis*.

The corporeal identity of America

At the turn of the sixteenth century, the Emperor Maximilian I commissioned a *Book of Hours*. To illustrate his manuscript, he recruited some of the most talented artists of the German Renaissance; among them, Albrecht Dürer. While the book is notable for a myriad of beautiful illustrations, one in particular bears noting here. On the eighty-first page of the text, stands a young man stripped to the waist, wearing a feathered headdress and grass skirt, he holds a club and a shield—a beaded necklace with feathers is secured tightly around his neck, and atop his head is a cap of plumed feathers. While the young man's ethnicity is unmistakably European, there is no doubt that the regalia he wears is of Brazilian origin. His appearance in the text marks the introduction of the twenty-fourth Psalm:

> The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therin. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. Who shall ascend unto the mountain of the Lord? Or Who shall stand in his Holy Place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity…

The image is one of utmost sensitivity; a liberal and inclusive vision of creation. In a book rich with mythic images: satyrs, dragons, demons, unicorns, saints, and classical heroes, the

young Tupinamba is ideally human. Serene, well-formed, and noble, the body he possesses is indicative of much of Dürer's work. Beyond complimenting the Psalm beautifully, the image is no doubt the most technically sophisticated visual depiction of an "American" produced in the sixteenth century. In a canon of rough woodcuts, clumsy illustrations, and literalist watercolors, Dürer's vision of the New World is not only evocative but perhaps the only moment when the aesthetic attentions of a sixteenth-century "master" artist are devoted to an American theme. It is a rare instance of discursive overlap in which two coeval yet rarely sympathetic periods of historical inquiry meet—it is the "philistine" Age of Discovery evocatively articulated by the High Renaissance.[99]

Dürer's 1515 American illustration, although an isolated gesture in his greater oeuvre, did not represent the culmination of his interest in the New World. In 1520 he would attend an exhibition staged by the Hapsburg emperor Charles V. An assortment of treasures recently shipped from the Yucatan by Hernán Cortés were on display in Brussels, and Dürer recorded his astonishment in his journal:

> I saw the things which have been brought to the King from the new golden land, a sun all of gold a whole fathom broad, and a moon all of silver of the same size, also two rooms full of the armour of the people there, and all manner of wondrous weapons of theirs, harnesses and darts, wonderful shields, strange clothing, bedspreads, and all kinds of wonderful objects of various uses, much more beautiful to behold than prodigies… All the days of my life I have seen nothing that has gladdened my heart so much as these things, for I saw amongst them wonderful works of art, and I

[99] The manuscript has been edited and reproduced by Walter L. Strauss, *The Book of Hours of the Emperor Maximilian the First* (New York: Abaris Books, 1974).

> marveled at the subtle *ingenia* of men in foreign lands, I cannot express all that I thought there.[100]

Sentiments like Dürer's complicate our understanding of European perceptions of the New World, not because they are positive (others also expressed favorable opinions of indigenous artifacts), but because they reveal the broad imaginative spectrum along which American mythologies could be crafted. For certainly, Dürer's romance is no more or less genuine than the nightmare scenarios detailed in the widely circulated letters of Amerigo Vespucci. Regardless of the fact that one is illustrating resplendent young natives while the other depicts stories of butchered young sailors, in both cases a limited and specific mythology is distilled from (and then reapplied to) the geography of an entire hemisphere. Of course, neither Dürer nor Vespucci realized the America to which he was referring took up the space of two large continents, but then, such are the unknowns that facilitate myth making. In all likelihood, the Mandeville author was equally ignorant in regards to the actual geographic dimensions of his Cathay.

In pursuit of a myth of the body

How then, can we begin to imagine an American body? What are its proportions? Is it corpus or geography? What are the patterns of its metaphor? Is its appearance in texts and illustrations political or stylistic? Some of these questions cannot be answered, while others can only be explored. Fortunately, it is always in the interest of any historical analysis to propose that things are more complicated than they first appear. If the American body is beyond singularly focused discussions of conquest, wonder, objectification, dehumanization, politics, and romance, it is because it contains elements of all of those concepts while

[100] I quote Hugh Honours translation as found in *New Golden Land: European Images of America from the Discoveries to the Present Time* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 28.

specifically adhering to none of them. Like all cultural themes, it is a reflection of multiple and scattered human impulses. Its expression, likewise, is sometimes inscrutable—the product of random discursive circumstance as opposed to careful discursive deliberation, which is perhaps just an extended way of suggesting that the images presented below cannot be entirely "reined in." They can be isolated, explicated, and historically situated, but they resist easy categorization. There are some images that will resist my thesis, many will fit it perfectly.

Defining myth

In order to proceed, two questions must be asked and answered. First, what is mythology and how is it defined throughout this essay. Mythology is certainly not synonymous with "fiction," for there are fictions that are not quite mythologies, and mythologies are that are not quite fictions. But what, one might ask then, is a fiction and what is its relationship to historical representation? A coterie of theorists has addressed this question, but it is my opinion that Paul Ricoeur's magisterial *Time and Narrative* provides the most elaborated inquiry upon which a meaningful *epistemico-semantic* distinction can be drawn between historical and fictional narrative. [101] In regards to the *epistemico-ontological* distinction between historical and fictional representation, it is assumed here that theorists ranging from Nietzsche to Derrida to Hayden White have all been correct: there is no meaningful distinction between the two.[102] The relationship between history and myth is

[101] Paul Ricouer's *Temps et récit* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1983-85) has been translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer as *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984-88).

[102] This opinion is neither as pessimistic nor as nihilistic as its opponents have generally portrayed it (nor is it as profound or as radically game-changing as many of its proponents have assumed). If anything, it is a rather sober and simple admission that the mental experience of composing or engaging a work of history is remarkably similar to the mental experience of composing or engaging a work of fiction. Because there is no way to cognitively gauge the relationship between the material being written/processed and the epistemological

perhaps even more ambiguous, so here I consult one of the most theoretically sensitive mythologists of the twentieth century, Roland Barthes.

At its base, Barthes posits mythology as a language that dangerously mediates between nature and historicity: "myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal."[103] For Barthes, myth is ultimately the most effective tool of bourgeois ideology, which can be interpolated historically as the desire to possess reality without confronting the challenging question of its myriad appearances. Things—alive, allusive, and impossible to fully trace in reality—are thus reduced to their most recognizable essence (what historians might think of as "essentialism"). Certainly, this appears true conceptually, but if Barthes would later correct himself, it is because it also appears true linguistically. Thus, Barthes' initial assertion that myth is *depoliticized* speech (politics defined as all the human relations in the real) cannot be accepted. Rather, every facet of communication has the potential to function mythically.

Thus, a myth is posited here as any signifier (word, concept, image) that has become so familiar that its rhetorical correspondence with the signified (what might be thought of roughly as "reality") has become "functionally blurred." Thus, a once focused and *specifically limited signifier* is transformed into a *signaling device* possessed of a multiplicity

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belief set of the writer/processor, there exists only a semantic (not ontologic) distinction that can be drawn between the two. A pedantic observation perhaps, but such are the demands of theoretical precision.

[103] The analysis performed in *Mythologies* (1957) was conducted before the linguistic turn was fully underway. Barthes' pioneering role in this movement is obvious, although it should be noted that his semiotic approach in *Mythologies*, as he himself would acknowledge in his 1970 preface, would undergo a significant evolution. However, it is my belief that the distinctions Barthes presented in the final essay "Myth today" are not only sound, but likewise somewhat more sophisticated than Barthes himself admits. Interestingly, the distinction Barthes draws seems, at least to me, to be the first extended discussion of what we as historians (over) refer to as "essentialism." I quote from Annette Lavers' translation, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

of deployable meanings.[104] Such signaling devices, once established, are incredibly useful due to the recognizablility of their form and the ambiguity of their semiotic location. Hence, myth might be thought of as the continual social handling of a sign; such repeated utilization dulls edges and corners, making the sign less "sharp," but therefore all the more easily shared.

Of course, this process is nonlinear, mythologies are continually refigured according to the demands of their historical emplotment. Thus, a "knife" might be taken to a well-worn myth in order to reproduce the jagged edges and dangerous corners that once made it so alluring. This is basically the process I am charting here, the social trafficking of a thematics of cultural difference. If I posit a "myth" of the American body, it is because a trope, namely the scene of "cannibal idyll" presented by Mandeville and explored at the end of the last chapter, became "functionally blurred" in the sixteenth century as European navigators, artists, cosmographers, and print-setters duplicated it to the point of exhaustion. Historically, the lifespan of this specific "myth" begins with the first letter of Columbus in 1493 and ends with the publication of Jean de Léry's *Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre Brésil* in 1578. Within this period, a host of textual and illustrative depictions of American bodies appear throughout Europe; and it is my belief that a mythology can be defined operating around them. If Léry functions as an endpoint, it is not because he avoids "mythologizing," but because he "takes a knife" to a signaling device that had become predictable and rhetorically

[104] This distinction is a problematic one: as long as language mediates between reality and subject, its components are fuzzy. One could certainly argue that all language, in so far as it is metaphorical (Signified X is *like* my concept Signifier Y), is also mythological (one can imagine a mythology of tables, shoes, laundry detergents, etc). But such specificity, although suggestive, is crippling to any analysis wishing to avoid a suspect metaphysics of language. See Hayden White on Ricouers' "metaphysics of narrativity," *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (John Hopkins University Press, 1987).

uninspiring. This refiguration of the American body initiated by Léry was completed by Montaigne in 1580 with the publication of his essay "Des Canibales."

What had once been a joint artistic and scientific understanding of the American body splits into two separate trajectories at the turn of the seventeenth century, one which will express itself allegorically (The "America!" of John Donne) and one which will express itself gradually towards a science of physical difference (which should not be thought of at this point as race). This paring is captured at the moment of its conceptual mitosis in the character of Caliban—that strange and composite body assembled out of so many discarded signs. The myth, however, does not die, it is simply divided.[105]

What is the body?

A previous chapter posited that all of the complex elements of cultural distance are oftentimes caught up and distilled into a symbolic body. It makes sense then that this body would possess a gender, and if we are to agree with the theorizing of Judith Butler, then this gender has to be consistently performed. Of course, the American body, as mythic body, can only perform its gender by way of text and illustration (rumor, another potential medium, is lost to the historian). Because the material here is European in origin, the codes by which the American body comes into being as subject are distinctly European codes—Butler at length on the law, sex, and performativity:

> The forming, crafting, bearing, circulation, signification of that sexed body will not be a set of actions performed in compliance with the law; on the contrary, they will be a set of actions mobilized by the law, the citational accumulation and dissimulation of the law that produces material effects, the lived necessity of those effects as well as

[105] This division will be explored in more detail in chapter 5.

> the lived contestation of that necessity. Performativity is thus not a singular "act," for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms…[106]

Heady stuff, no doubt; likewise, a statement in need of some transposition in order to function in the space of this essay.

Obviously, Butler is referring to subjects, not concepts, but the distinction is ultimately less meaningful within the realm of history, for no true subject exists with whom the historian might engage. As a result, the discussion of historical agency, as relevant or meaningful as it might be, is always a dead one: textual traces do not move—it is the incredible albeit terrifying obligation of the historian to make them move. Thus, the American body is no more or less imbued with gender agency than any other subject textually reanimated for the purpose of historical investigation. Accordingly, it will be assumed here that the "body" is simply another cultural mythology concerning the *perceived* persistence of an organism, whether the organism is understood singularly or collectively makes no difference, for the body is always understood *in relation*. Nowhere is this truer than in regards to gendered language.

Is the American body statically gendered? Certainly not, oftentimes it is a concept experiencing "gender trouble"— androgyny is one of its key characteristics. However, at its most voracious, the American body is almost always depicted as female. The letters of Vespucci, with their descriptions of relentless female appetites—both sexual and cannibal—established what would remain the most viable element of the sixteenth-century myth of the American body, namely, the fecundity and sexual availability of the indigenous woman. Eventually, this common discovery trope would morph into an extensive series of

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[106] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 12.

seventeenth-century allegories in which America was personified as cannibal queen, bountiful mother, mysterious paramour, or eager virgin. In the sixteenth century, however, the rumor of insatiable American lusts supplied just one third of a tripartite vision of the New World in which lust, fear, and bounty wove a matrix of sublime images. These images, strewn chaotically across the cultural landscape of sixteenth-century Europe, were invested with an exaggerated corporeality. Whatever the gender of the American body, there is no doubt that it occupied a crucial and productive spot in whatever we want to consider the "European imagination."

A few final caveats

As Roland Barthes reminds us, there is always a mythology of the mythologist, or in this case, the historian. Regardless of temporal or cultural location, images serve those who employ them, and the description of a mythology automatically implicates one in the participation of its construction. As analysts, we are simply updating a network of crude signaling devices, saying different things about our signs, but exploiting them all the same. One must not be overly shrill then when announcing an historical ethics, lest one forget that as historians we also resurrect images in the service of our own rhetorical goals: careers to further, conferences to organize, M.A. theses to progress. As such, there are no guilty texts, just guilty analysts.

That in mind, it should be stated that the "myth" of the American body proposed here does not belong to a collection of cosmographers, missionaries, artists, and cultural commentators of the sixteenth-century, but rather, it belongs to the space of this essay. It has not been cobbled together in order to ask "why?"—as tempting as it would be to isolate, contextualize, and thoroughly dissect each text and image. Rather, my more modest aim is a

general thematic exploration linking images and tropes in an attempt to say something meaningful about broader cultural processes.

Finally, the following argument generally avoids the concept of the Indian; particularly, the detailed explication the concept received in the work of Spanish intellectuals and politicians. The move is not an attempt to deny Spanish contributions to the overall perception of the American body (such a stance would be absurd), but to emphasize the fact that the multiple discourses taking place at Cadiz, Seville, Salamanca, and Madrid, did not necessarily represent broader Western European ideas of the New World to the extent that is generally believed. Elsewhere, other depictions (mainly those supplied by Vespucci, Columbus, and Peter Martyr before 1520) had already worked to establish certain "dominant images" that continued to be duplicated long after Mesoamerican and Andean encounter. While the Indian became a dominant tropological theme in Spain as early as the 1530s, documents from elsewhere in Europe were more likely to talk of "natives," "savages," and "cannibals."[107] I believe this avoidance of the Indian concept helps better disaggregate perceptions of sixteenth-century European depictions of indigenous peoples, perceptions which in the U.S. academy have been so far heavily informed by discussions of Spanish documents.

[107] This observation appears to hold until sometime in the 1580s, when persistent Spanish depictions of Mesoamerican and Andean societies began to complicate earlier perceptions of unclad, uncivilized savages. Calvinist Pastor Jean de Léry, for example, was certainly familiar with Gomará's *Historia* when he published his *Histoire d'un voyage* in 1578 (he cites the text several times), however he does not seem to be aware of Oviedo, Vitoria, Las Casas, Sepulveda, and the ongoing debate that would cement the concept of the Indian as a conflated ethnic subject. As Léry augmented and published subsequent editions of his *Histoire* (1580, 1585, 1598), he grew increasingly familiar with the narrative of conquest. By 1598, he would devote an entirely new chapter to the work in which he emphasized the "barbarity" of Spanish colony, a chapter in which he relies heavily on Las Casas. On this point, one is encouraged to see the cross-textual analysis of Scott D. Juall "'Beaucoup plus barbares que les Sauvages mesmes': Cannibalism, Savagery, and Religious Alterity in Jean de Léry's Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil (1599-1600)," *L'Esprit Créateur* Vol. 48, No. 1 (2008): 58-71.

What I am presenting then is not the *definitive* myth of the American body, but what might be thought of as an *alternative* myth, one that seems to have floated about Western Europe from 1493 to 1580. Less intensely politicized, many of the images I will explore cannot be fixed within any strict progressive or chronological framework. Such American bodies were transient bodies; bodies imagined for a portrait or brought to life briefly in a text for the sake of anecdote or exemplum. These alien figures, rarely named and rarely given voice, moved specter-like throughout Renaissance Europe, quietly contributing to its aesthetic understanding of Elsewhere. Therefore, when speaking of the American body, we can speak only of appearances, not origins.

Such an admission does not entirely excuse the wide ranging examination presented below, but it does provide it with a little more contextualization. Thus, a grossly general thematic exploration is opted for instead of a shambling and unsupportable forensic analysis; all in hopes of avoiding overly-determined and undocumented statements about historical processes. Hence the crucial need to emphasize the word "mythology," and to claim it as my own within the space of this text.

Perhaps equally important, is the need to stress the idea of individual imagination at the same time that we pursue generic tropes and recycled descriptions. The historic texts and illustrations detailed in this essay all had rhetorical aims, but these aims were forwarded by tapping into a preexisting reservoir of intricate symbols. These symbols were political yes, but imaginative also—a collection of signs culled from much older mythologies to engender new ones. In this chapter, I will be speaking about both the American Body writ large as a concept as well as many of the individual American bodies presented in texts and illustrations that contribute to that larger corpus. No proper division exists between the two—

there is no way to isolate the one from the other; herein lies the essential ambivalence that underwrites the myth of the American Body.

Some notes towards a myth of the American body:[108]*

> *'But I never looked like that!' How do you know? What is the 'you' you might or might not look like? Where do you find it – by which morphological or expressive calibration? Where is your authentic body? You are the only one who can never see yourself except as an image;…even and especially for your own body, you are condemned to the repertoire of its images.*
>
> Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*[109]

Some things that American bodies are:

I. American bodies are contranymic:

American bodies are at odds with themselves. They are at the same time pristine and bestial, innocent yet implicated, brand new though inherited, feckless but useful, seemingly eternal though damned due to their ignorance of the Word. However, self-contradiction is not self-antagonism. Like Derrida's *pharmakon*, the American body harbors within itself a "complicity of contrary values;" functioning so seductively as myth because it is not substance but constellation: it is too distant to be met, so it has to be read. Disparate readings engender new life. Because it holds no fixed identity, the American body must be continually

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[108]* Here I employ the present tense as a conceptual device—both for the sake of fluid written presentation, as well as to assert the dual nature of myth: a process that is somehow both static yet persistently alive. To avoid repetition, it should be understood that the mythological body I am tracing is generally the creation of North Western Europeans, non-hegemonic in the scope of its deployment, and specific to the sixteenth century. As such, I hope to avoid continually recycling such phrases as "for some Europeans," "In the sixteenth-century," "in some instances," etc. It seems to me that the concept "American body" will grow tiresome enough without freighting it with repetitive qualifiers.

[109] Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Macmillan, 1977), 36. It would be disingenuous to allow the reader to believe this quotation has not been shamelessly pilfered from Jonathan Sawday's *The Body Emblazoned*, where he employs this quote near the end of his introduction on page 15.

captured and recaptured in representation. It rarely speaks, and when it does, the translation is often corrupt (*cariba, caniba*, cannibal). Is it any surprise that Montaigne's Brazilian interview would be botched by the inadequacy of his translator? The American body holds no extended conferences, but it stages many pageants.

At Rouen in 1550 it is capable of the most profound self-mimicry. In October, Henri II and Catherine de Medici arrive at the Norman capital where they are welcomed by a performance of fifty Tupinamba Indians and two-hundred and fifty odd sailors and prostitutes. A collection of watercolor miniatures are produced to document the "Fête Bresilienne."[110] Along the banks of the Seine, a nude horde of Tupinamba and Norman sailors are depicted staging mock battles, felling trees, swimming, carousing, hunting, and burning a native village.[111] Even at its most immediate, transported into the familiarity of Europe, the American body is encouraged to participate in the construction of its own mythology. At the same time, it coaxes new disciples from the docks of Rouen to share in its nudity; Norman sailors, it should be remembered, were notorious for their propensity to "go native." André Thevet produces his *Les singularitez de la France Antarctique* in 1557. The woodcuts he commissioned for the work are seven years late—the American body presages its own interpretation.

To function, a myth has to remain turbulent yet recognizable. It must reveal itself in surprising places, but when it does, it must fulfill all other expectations. The American body

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[110] See, Stéphane de Merval, *L'Entrée de Henri II Roi de France à Rouen au mois d'octobre 1550. Orné de dix planches gravées a l'eau forte par Louis de Merval,* ed. Stéphane de Merval pour Sociéte des Bibliophiles Normands (Rouen: Imprimerie de Henry Boissel, 1868). See also, Jean-Marie Massa, "Le monde luso-bréslien dans la joyeuse entrée de Rouen' in *Les Fêtes de la Renaissance*, vol. III: 105-116 (Paris, 1980). Ferdinand Denis, *Une Fête Brésilienne Célébrée à Rouen en 1550* (Paris: J. Techener, 1850).

[111] The illustration has been produced in a number of text the most accessible being Hugh Honour's *The New Golden Land: European Images of America from the Discoveries to the Present Time* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 63.

transmits an essential tension into the sixteenth century. Its appearance is unexpected yet its depiction is well-rehearsed. It is not a pure translation of the mythic body, but then there are no pure translations. Instead, it is one of the first entries in the modern myth of the body ideal: not as husk, shell, vessel, or tomb, but as corporal exemplum capable of participating in a broader aesthetics.

II. American bodies are naked bodies:

Nudity is the defining characteristic of the American body. Beyond any other description, it is the general nakedness of those dwelling in the New World that must be first related back to Europe. Despite the widespread utilization of clothing in both Peru and Mesoamerica, representations of clothed Americans are proportionately scarce.[112] When visually depicted, the American body resists the garment. Clothing, when offered, will be enthusiastically paraded before being ambivalently peeled off. "It has never been in our power," says Jean de Léry of the Tupi women, "to make them wear clothes."[113] Paint is the only outfit in which the American body is entirely comfortable. Not only is the American body nude, it is often hairless. A general obsession with body hair (or the lack thereof) marks multiple reports from the New World. This observation is especially true in regards to Brazilian and Caribbean native women, whose practice of plucking the body smooth became a fixation of many of the earliest correspondents. Portuguese chronicler Pero Vaz de

[112] For a broad examination of American images, see again Hugh Honour, *The New Golden Land.* For a detailed collection and chronology of European depictions of Americans before Theodor de Bry, see William C. Sturtevant "First Visual Images of Native America," in *The First Images of America*, ed. Fredi Chiappelli. (Los Angeles and Berkley: University of California Press, 1976) 417-454. Sturtevant catalogs 268 different depictions by 40 different artists. To the best of my knowledge, there is no rough estimate of existing images of Americans in the sixteenth century. Sturtevant's study, though intensely researched and well detailed, is focused primarily on the ethnographic insight such images can provide; while not the goal of this essay, his analysis is invaluable.

[113] Jean de Léry, *Histoire d'un Voyage,* 66.

Caminha, for example, enthusiastically expressed such lurid fascinations in a letter addressed to Manoel I (1500):

> Three or four girls went among them. Good and young and tender. With long and very black hair hanging down their backs. And their privy parts were so high and tightly closed and so free from pubic hair that, even when we examined them very closely, they did not become embarrassed…[another women] all dyed from head to foot in that paint; and indeed she was so well built and so well cured, and her privy part (what a one she had!) was so gracious that many women of our country, on seeing such charms, would be ashamed that theirs were not like hers.[114]

The American body is a revelation. Dwelling outside of Christendom, it is beyond "a sense of shame and embarrassment," these bodies go about "exactly as the day they were born," a phrase encountered so regularly throughout the early source material that it becomes one of the major tropological figures of New World description. The letters of both Columbus and Vespucci secure the image of the unclad native for poserity. "The people of these islands, as far as I have seen and know, go always nude as they were born," writes Columbus in his first letter home, "except for some of the women, who might use a leaf or small tree branch."[115] Vespucci reaffirms such nudity, "All of both sexes go about naked, covering no part of their bodies; and just as they spring from their mother's wombs so they

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[114] If I cite from John Hemming's *Red Gold* here, it is because his translation is exceptionally enthusiastic, as is his discussion of Caminha and this specific Euro-American encounter. All of which suggests that subtle new myths are always being crafted within the very "demythologizing" secondary works in which historians invest so much authority. Hemming's "figurative echo" just happens to be very amusing in its own right. See, *Red Gold: The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians* (London: Macmillan London, 1978), 4-5.

[115] The translation is my own. The original text reads: *Hujus quidem et omnium aliarum, quas ego vidi et quarum cognitionem habeo, incolae eutriusque sexus nudi simper incedunt. Praeter aliquas feminas, quae folio frondeve aliqua aut bombyeino velo pudenda operiunt quod ipsae sibi ad id negotii parant. Epistola Christofori Colom* (1493).

go until death."[116] The myth persists in the majority of artistic depictions from the period which show either totally nude bodies or bodies stripped save for a grass skirt or other small ornament to cover the genitals. Beyond the very first woodcuts accompanying the correspondence of Columbus and Vespucci, the nude would evolve. The woodcuts commissioned by André Thevet for his *Singularitez* in 1557 represent a significant mutation.

In his *Singularitez*, American bodies "*vivant touts nuds ainsi qu'ils sortent du ventre de la mere, tant hommes que femmes, sans aucune honte out vergonge*."[117] Like the illustrations provided by German captive Hans Staden the same year, Thevet's woodcuts depict entirely naked figures (the dimensions of these bodies shall be discussed shortly). A little less than twenty years later, more woodcuts of Brazilian natives would accompany his *Cosmographie Universelle* (1575). While Jean de Léry would shortly add to this collection of Tupi images, it is the Calvinist minister's evocative description of native undress that remains his most significant contribution to the myth of the unclad native woman:

> This creature delights so much in her nakedness that it was not only the Tupinamba women of the mainland, living in full liberty with their husbands, fathers, and kinsmen, who were so obstinate in refusing to dress themselves in any way at all; even our women prisoners of war, whom we had bought and whom we held as slaves to work in our fort—even they, although we forced clothing on them, would secretly strip off the shifts and other rags, as soon as night had fallen, and would not be

[116] *Munus Novus: Letter to Lorenzo Pietro di Medici* (Paris? 1503) trans. George Tyler Northup, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1916) 5.
[117] *Les Singularitez de la France Antarctique* (1557) I quote from the 1878 edition compiled and edited by Paul Gaffarel.

> content unless, before going to bed, they could promenade naked all around our island.[118]

It is an evocative image, one of the most poetic (and likewise humorous) examples of cultural resistance one encounters in early descriptions of the New World. Perhaps it is possible that even tropes, given enough time, find subtle ways to express their own agency.

III. American bodies are well-proportioned:

Although a few monsters can be found in the earliest works concerning the New World (a vague allusion to dog-headed men in the first letter of Columbus, Patagonian giants in Pigafetta's *Relazione del primo viaggio*), the bodies encountered by the first voyagers—especially within the texts of the most widely published early documents—are positively depicted. In his first letter (1493), Columbus wrote of the native population, "I did not find monsters among them, as some had expected, but a people of great reverence and kindness."[119] Vespucci, in his popular *Mundus Novus* (Paris? 1502), writes:

> They have indeed large square-built bodies, well formed and proportioned… They, too, have hair plentiful and black. In their gait and when playing their games they are agile and dignified. They are comely…[120]

Throughout these first texts, one encounters predominantly flattering physical descriptions (primarily of bodies, not necessarily of *faces*: "They are not very fair of countenance, because they have broad faces," notes Vespucci in the Soderini Letter). These

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[118] Jean de Léry, Jean de Lery, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, trans. Janet Whatley (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 67.
[119] The translation is my own, the original text reads: "Nullum apud eos monstrum reperi, ut plerique existimabant, sed hominess magnae reverentiae atque benignos." *Epistola Christofori Colom* (1493).
[120] *Mundus Novus*, 5.

first sentiments will be widely echoed later on. Writing nearly eighty years afterward, Jean de Léry assures his readers in a chapter of his *Histoire* that the natives of Brail are

> …not taller, fatter, or smaller in stature than Europeans are; their bodies are neither monstrous nor prodigious with respect to ours. In fact, they are stronger, more robust and well filled-out, more nimble, less subject to disease; there are almost none among them who are lame, one-eyed, deformed, or disfigured.[121]

The woodcuts accompanying the text of the *Histoire* well illustrate Léry's description. Each Tupi body is possessed of thick and tawny limbs, the torso is well-toned and robust, and the poses struck by each figure suggest strength and agility. Similar visual depictions are common, particularly within artwork specifically detailing the Tupinamba and the natives of Brazil.[122] Outside of the immensely influential woodcuts produced in France after the 1550s, the most physically ample and classically inspired representations of New World inhabitants come predominantly from Germany. Besides the previously discussed Dürer illustration, contemporary German artists such as Albrecht Altdorfer and Hans Burgkmair also devoted engravings and prints to Americans in the illuminated manuscript *The Triumph of Maximilian I* (1526).[123] These depictions present taut, full-bodied figures engaging in scenes from daily life; in no way are these natives physically inferior to the Europeans, Asians, and Africans surrounding them.

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[121]Léry, 56.

[122] The Tupinamba (who are often specifically labeled as such) and other depictions of Brazilian natives (who are often generically labeled "Brazilian") are disproportionately represented in the visual source material. The reasons for which are various and include: a larger Tupi "tourist" presence in Europe, a general familiarity with Tupi artifacts (as was the case for Albrect Dürer illustration discussed earlier), as well as the massive imaginative impact exerted by the woodcuts and illustrations supplied by André Thevet and Hans Staden in the late 1550s.

[123] For a collection of these woodcuts see, *The Triumph of Maximilian I: 137 Woodcuts by Hans Burgkmair and Others* trans. with descriptions, notes and introduction by Stanley Appelbaum (New York: Dover Publications, 1964).

Elsewhere, one is reminded of the longevity of New World inhabitants, who often live anywhere from 100-150 years depending on the source. The American body is above all a healthy one. It is clean, well-groomed, and long-lived. Secure in its paradise, it testifies to the corruption of civilization and the revitalizing powers of nature. The American body suggests fecundity: it is constantly surrounded by children; it is generally young, virile and often armed; it is visibly immune to the effects of age; it is beyond the reality of disease; and the food that sustains it—gathered in haphazard piles and roasting on spits—is grotesquely abundant. Ultimately, it is an ancient body adhering to the physical logic of the past. As such, it is often classically stylized: its visual morphology is often uncannily Greek.

IV. American bodies are interchangeable

As a rule, American bodies are anonymous. The great rulers of Mexico and Peru would receive names, but most of the bodies drifting through letters and appearing on woodcuts were imagined without them. Likewise, the American body is generally described and understood collectively: *les sauvages*; the Cannibals; *la gente*; *Omnes*. Contained in Columbus' first letter are these interesting remarks:

> In all these islands there is no diversity among these peoples in terms of appearance, nor in manners or language, but they all understand each other, a very favorable circumstance for that which are most excellent king wishes to accomplish, that is to say, the conversion of these souls to the holy faith of Christ… [124]

Uncomplicated by the messy details of ethnic or cultural diversity, the natives of the New World reaffirm the canonical myth of the Golden Age.

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[124] *Epistola Christofori Colom* (1493), the original text reads: In omnibus his insulis nulla est diversitas inter gentis effigies, nulla in moribus atque loquela, quin omnes se intelligent adinvicem, quae res perutilis est ad id quod Sernissimum Regem nostrum exoptare praecipue reor, scilicet eorum ad sanctam Christi fidem conversionem.

American bodies, then, are interchangeable, not only amongst themselves, but with all other familiar forms of wildness. The first woodcuts accompanying the letters of Vespucci, for example, depict bodies covered in thick fur (still naked however). These Americans, it would appear, had been imagined as European wildmen, the mythic branch of humanity containing the wodewose, the lycanthrope, and those particularly hirsute giants and outlaws patrolling the edges of civilization.[125] Although not a dominant image, rumors of heavily furred bodies would persist.[126] Some seventy years after Vespucci, Jean de Léry's confronts the notion of "hair-covered savages" in his *Histoire d'un Voyage faict en la terre Brésil.* (in certain folios of Thevet one finds a variant discussion of Brazilian's covered with scales, one of the rare "*deformités des Ameriques*.")[127] Such folkloric inspirations, although not uncommon, would be generally eclipsed by the image of the American as New World classical nude.

By the 1550s, engraving throughout Europe had achieved new heights of sophistication. The same German masters who had provided the prints and illuminations for the veritable "human menagerie" contained in *The Triumph of Maximilian I*, had inspired printmakers throughout Europe. By the 1550s, the blocky and impressionistic woodcuts that had accompanied the earliest published reports of the New World had been superseded by far more elegant and stylized depictions of human bodies. Although Hans Staden's personal illustrations reveal the hand of an amateur, the woodcuts accompanying the texts of Thevet's *Singularitez* and *Cosmographie Universelle* and Léry's *Histoire d'un Voyage* would prove

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[125] For an excellent discussion of the European Wildman, see Richard Bernheimer's classic *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A study in art, sentiment, and demonology* (New Haven: Harvard University Press, 1952).
[126] For a slightly different take on the importation of European folklore into the Americas, see Carolyn Podruchny "Werewolves and Windingos: Narratives of Cannibal Monsters in French-Canadian Voyageur Oral Tradition," *Ethnohistory* 51:4 (Fall, 2004): 678-700.
[127] Again, I cite from the Gaffarel edition. Andre Thevet, *Les singularitez de la France Antarctique*, 167.

incredibly influential. These well-formed figures would later find their way into the work of Theodor de Bry, who cemented the portrait of the neoclassical American body in the European imagination for almost two hundred years.

Sixteenth-century print imagery, American or otherwise, proved remarkably fluid. Woodcuts had a way of migrating from text to text; extracted from original publications to be duplicated elsewhere according to necessity. The conflation of the American body in European representations, so far treated abstractly, was certainly also a matter of basic utility. Printmakers and publishers needed illustrations, and only so many images existed. The work of the de Bry family, amassed and inspired by multiple previously published sources, is just the most obvious example of the migrant nature of late Renaissance illustrations. Such artisanal pragmatism, however, would dynamically privilege those bodies encountered in Brazil. Out of the roughly 300 known original images relating to the New World produced before the 1590s, a conspicuous portion of them feature distinctly Tupi imagery.[128]

There seems to have been something particularly alluring about Brazilian natives to many European artists and thinkers. While logistics and happenstance were certainly at work, a whole list of reasons might explain why images from Brazil came to be so heavily influential: the Tupi were some of the first Americans to visit the Old World; Thevet, Staden, and Léry all produced captivating stories and had the means to commission woodcuts; images from Iberia were more "culturally isolated" than those produced elsewhere. Likewise, and perhaps even more importantly, there seems to be a certain tropological affinity between the Tupi image and the early textual descriptions that dominated European understandings of the New World. The very first American bodies reported back on the continent were nude,

[128] For a detailed annotated chronology, see William C. Sturtevant "First Visual Images of Native America."

jovial, simple and cannibal. They were similarly without a recognizable cosmology or a system of culture perceptively comparable (or challenging) to European civilization. Unlike the "idolatrous" and more threatening bodies encountered in Mexico and Peru, the Tupi seem to have comfortably fulfilled European expectations. As a result, Brazilian imagery crept northward. Montaigne's "Aztecs" wear lip disks, and Tupi battle regalia floats from painting to painting (we have already seen how it appears as early as 1515 in the illustration provided by Dürer). William Sturtevant long ago posited the "Tupinambization" of the North American Indian; in regards to the sixteenth century, this argument proves quite convincing.[129]

Because American bodies are interchangeable, generally anonymous, and bound to a select history of depictions, they are easy to conflate. As in all mythos, dominant images inevitably come to the fore. Of course, alternate images exist and are always ready to challenge popularly established perceptions, but the power and saliency of original symbols proves difficult to displace. As such, it is perhaps not too presumptuous to suggest that American bodies, though assembled back in Europe, are generally constructed with parts made in Brazil.

Some things that American bodies do:

V. American bodies resist organization

Although predicated on the existence of a hierarchy of values, mythologies often frustrate systematic classification. Almost immediately, exceptions, variants, and alternate readings appear to expel the hope for clean, easily determined categories. Perhaps it is this very challenge—the desire to organize the intrinsically disordered—that catalyzes the myth

[129] William Sturtevant, "La tupinambisation des Indiens d'Amérique du Nord," *Les Figures de l'Indien* ed. Giles Nerien (Montreal: Service des Publications de l'Université du Québec à Montréal, 1988).

making process. After all, what is a mythology if not a collective attempt to provide sharper dimensions to the vague silhouettes suggested by multiple imaginations? Paradoxically, the myth of the American body depends on its resistance to the catalogs that render it visible.

It has become a commonplace to refer to the Jesuit observation (one too clever by half) that the language of the Indian (inevitably universal) lacks the letters L, R, F (legis, fides, regis), the three organizing principles of European society. Perhaps most crucially in this formulation, is the concept of legis, for American bodies fail to recognize law. The trope of "harmonious social chaos" is first forwarded in Vespucci's wildly popular *Mundus Novus.* The text asserts that the inhabitants of the New World recognize no form of government, no stable marriage laws, and lack any sort of taboo preventing the practice of incest:

> They live together without king, without government, and each is his own master. They marry as many wives as they please; and son cohabits with mother, brother with sister, male cousin with female, and any man with the first woman he meets. They dissolve their marriages as often as they please, and observe no sort of law with respect to them… They live according to nature… [130]

Likewise, these newly discovered peoples fail to recognize the law of possession. In the so-called Soderini letter, Vespucci asserts,

> They engage in no barter; they neither buy nor sell. In short, they live and are contented with what nature gives them. The wealth which we affect in this our Europe and elsewhere, such as gold, jewels, pearls, and other riches, they hold of no

[130] *Munus Novus,* 6.

> value at all; and although they have them in their lands, they do not work to get them, nor do they care for them.[131]

Both assertions will incredibly impact the development of New World imagery. While Vespucci presents these descriptions negatively, they will be gradually augmented by more poetic minds over the course of the sixteenth century. Eventually, these accusations of "harmonious social chaos" are comparatively set against ordered yet corrupt depictions of European society. Jean de Léry will master such juxtaposition in his *Histoire*, but the trope seems to have cropped up as early as the 1540s. In an anonymous Erasmian tract published at Venice in 1540, images of idyllic natives function as political invective. The tract was later translated into French in 1566 at Paris by Hertman Barbé, the text reads:

> And to provide more clear and satisfactory evidence of such a life, [consider] the customs and practices of the people newly discovered in the West Indies, who are quite happy without laws, without letters, and without any wise men, they do not prize gold nor precious jewels: and neither do they know avarice, or ambition, or any other sort of artifice.[132]

This trope will be later modified by Léry and explicitly plagiarized by Montaigne.[133] Although American society is gradually perceived as more structured than initially portrayed (Thevet, for example, corrects Vespucci by assuring his readers that American incest does

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[131] Amerigo Vespucci, *Letter to Piero Soderini* (Gonflaloniere, 1504), trans. George Tyler Northup, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1916), 9.

[132] I cite from the Hertman Barbé's French translation, the English translation is my own. The original text reads: "Et en font davantage preuve suffisante et manifeste la vie, les coutumes et les façons de faire du people nouvellement decouvert en l'Indie Occidentale, lesquels bienheureux sans lois, sans letters, et sans aucuns sages, ne prisaient rien l'or, ni les joyaux précieux: et ne connaissaient ni l'avarice, ni l'ambition, ni quelque autre art que ce fut*"*. The text can be found in *Le Brésil de Montaigne: Le Nouveau Monde des <<Essais>>* choix de texts, introduction et notes de Frank Lestringant (Paris: Chandeigne 2005).

[133] *La Pazzia* was first identified as a source for "Des Cannibales" by José V. de Piña Martins, "Modèls portugas et italiens de Montaigne," in *Montaigne et l'Europe. Actes du Colloque International de Bordeaux* (Mont-de-Marsan: Editions InterUniversitaires, 1992) pg. 139-152.

not take place among siblings), it will continually resist any total governing framework.[134] Instead, the negative idea of chaos gradually mutates into the positive ideal of nature. If mid to late sixteenth-century American bodies do not require kings, judges, magistrates, and laws, it is because they operate according to the precepts of "natural order."

VI. American bodies lust casually (near paradise)

Perhaps paradise is the locus of all casual desire: a hole on the map in which to deposit all the cravings too general to be pursued in reality. It seems fair to suggest that paradise is impressionistic—it is a place without location supplied with pleasures that defy detailed articulation. As such, paradise is best depicted in rough strokes and casual language—it is a place to be imagined in the vernacular. Admittedly, the New World was never quite perceived as paradise, but it served, at least for awhile, as Europe's closest approximation. Its most lyrical poets were sailors and those other immodest chroniclers unafraid to voice their enthusiasm. Lust is inscribed all over this new geography, but it is a peculiar lust, one that expresses itself casually, one unburdened by civil mores and the shame provoked by the institutionalization of sex in the form of marriage.

It follows then, that the New World is not one of the multiple Utopias that it would provoke, it is too uncivil, messy, and turbulent; but neither is it a Sodom or other place of *bacchanalia*, for its inhabitants are not reveling in their own trespass, and there is no essential rupture to mark the sex act as deviant. It follows then that the New World is not a site of transgression. Rather, it is "place between a place between:" one of those half-fictional

[134] Thevet, *Les Singularitez*: "And one should not think, that our Americans are any more discreet in their marriages than in other matters. They marry one to the other without any ceremonies. Cousin with cousin, uncle with niece—without difference or reprehension, but not the brother with the sister."
The original text reads: "Et pour ce ne faut penser, que noz Ameriques soient plus discrets en leurs marriages, qu'en autres choses. Ils se marient les uns avec les autres, sans aucunes cerimonies. Le cousin prendra la cousine, et l'oncle prendra la niece sans difference ou reprehension, mais non le frère la souer.*"*
Les Singularitez, ed. Paul Gaffarel, 210.

mirror spaces that Foucault theorized as coming before the sanctioned depositories of deviance (asylums, prisons, boarding schools, hospitals, nursing homes).

Foucault, for his own part, posits two separate liminal grounds: the Utopia, which is completely imaginary, and therefore a site on which to wage ideological battles, and the Heterotopia, a space which is both real and imagined for the sake of being real: burial plots, landmarks of initiation, circumscribed areas of social pollution for adolescents, menstruating and pregnant women, warriors coming off a kill, the elderly and the infirm.[135] Between this space, Foucault allows for the existence of a mirroring location, which is simultaneously utopia and heterotopia, it is a distant place where one can project oneself, but a place near enough (imaginatively) to induce reflection—perhaps paradise fulfils this function. Because Foucault's notion is both beautiful and very relevant to what I am trying to accomplish here, it is worth quoting at length:

> The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, vir-tual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see

[135] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec in *Diacritics* Vol. 16 No. 1 (Spring: 1986) pp. 22-27. Editor: "This text, entitled "Des Espaces Autres," and published by the French journal Architecture-Mouvement-Continuite in October, 1984, was the basis of a lecture given by Michel Foucault in March 1967. Although not reviewed for publication by the author and thus not part of the official corpus of his work, the manuscript was released into the public domain for an exhibition in Berlin shortly before Michel Foucault's death. Attentive readers will note that the text retains the quality of lecture notes".—Ed. *Diacritics*.—Although not an officially published work and although still rough, this piece goes a long way in revealing how Foucault might have conceived the relationship of *imagined* space (the crux of his project) and *imaginary* space. I employ it here because travel literature as a genre still lacks a major theorist.

> myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.

What is paradise then in Western Christendom? It is the place that had been possessed and lost; but also the place that will one day be possessed again. It is a "placeless place" that paradoxically exists *somewhere*; a restless place, one that skids across the map according to the dictates of imagination and politic. It is a place marked off by seraphim and flaming sword, not a location one can physically occupy, but a place where one might mentally project oneself and reflect on the nature of the broader world. As in Marco Polo's *Divisament*, it is a place that can be faked. As at Rouen, it is a place that can be performed. And as in the earliest depictions of the New World, it is a place that can be alluded to; if it is stocked full of bodies lusting casually, perhaps it is because sixteenth-century Christians discovered in Muhammad's paradise—an obsessive point of reference in literature detailing the exploration of the Levant—something more to desire. Leisure and bounty, it seems, were not enough.

Vespucci, a subtly prurient mind, does more than any one figure to cement the notion of the relentlessly lascivious American body. It is in his letters that we find descriptions of native women so enflamed with lust that they encourage their partners to infect their

phalluses with insect venom. Thus engorged, the member can satisfy the sexual appetite, but only at the risk of permanent damage. "Many lose their organs which break through lack of attention and they remain eunuchs," writes Vespucci—this is clearly not an act reminiscent of the well-orchestrated yet sanitized unions taking place in Europe.[136] Nor, to be fair, is it an act invoking images of paradise, but such is the nature of the desire marking the sixteenth-century "cannibal idyll," which has a way of insisting on all the dangers inherent in its consummation.

However, to go on harping on the sexual figuration of American lust would be to over-emphasize its most basic manifestation in depictions of the New World. Lust is perhaps best understood as a more general energy: a relish for life; an appreciation for good food; a love of leisure; an exuberant attitude towards violence; and a casual pleasure in general carnality. "They hate those who are taciturn, stingy, and melancholy," writes Jean de Léry, "and I can assure any who are sly, malicious, gloomy, niggardly, or who munch their bread alone in a corner, that they will never be welcome among our Tupinamba; for by their nature they detest such manner of folk."[137] The observation is borne out in so many European illustrations, images that seek to depict a new Golden Age, the choice of classical forms—while certainly a matter of tastes and logistics (artists had only so many bodies in their repertoire), is also a revealing aspect of the way in which many Europeans imagined this New World.

When examining the paintings, illustrations, and woodcuts, one is overwhelmed by the sheer amount of food scattered about: pineapples, nursing mothers, an abundance of spits, *boucans*, and a variety of roasting flesh (most of it human). Figures are frequently shown

[136] *Mundus Novus*, 7.
[137] Léry, 99.

preparing meals, either hacking at bodies or preparing fires. In the Burgamen's illustration for the *Triumph of Maximilian I*, what might almost be mistaken for a market scene unfolds; children scamper at their mothers' feet, and men carry foodstuffs and other wares; it is a busy scene for sure, but one attesting to abundance, not commerce.

Yet, all of the visual energy in these depictions is almost always expressed communally. There are relatively few portraits of isolated American bodies (the Tupi warrior of Albrecht Dürer is the most obvious exception). This suggests that paradise has been populated. Because figures are interchangeable, the passions they express in these images can only be understood communally. Bonds are shown (mother and child, husband and wife, executioner and victim) but the general sense of "copious disorder" that marks these illustrations suggests a promiscuous asociety, one that gives and takes its pleasures casually.

VII. American bodies share with others

If American bodies are disorganized, that does not mean they lack harmony. The New World is a rich land producing a bounty of natural miracles. The soil is luxuriant and "admirably adapted for tillage, pasture, and habitation." Yet it goes untended, for in the New World flora and fauna are collected not cultivated. Having no need to protect the work of their hands, American bodies commune with each other. In the first of his popular *Decades* series, Peter Martyr waxed poetically on the nature of American life:

> And only if they had received other religion, I would think their life the most happy of all men, if they might therewith enjoy there ancient liberty. A few things content them, having no delight in such superfluities, for which in other places men take infinite pains, and commit many unlawful acts, and yet are never satisfied, whereas many have too much, and none enough… So if we should not be ashamed to confess

> the truth, they seem to live in the Golden World of which old writers speak so much: wherein men lived simple and innocent, without enforcement of laws, without quarrelling, Judges, and libels content only to satisfy nature, unburdened by the knowledge of things to come.[138]

It is a figure that we have seen before (in Mandeville, Columbus, *La Pazzia*) and one that we will attempt to parse when we arrive at Montaigne's "Des Cannibales." For Martyr, these "naked people" are not immune to ambition, but those ambitions they do possess (glory in war, expansion of domain and renown, the taking of captives) are not pecuniary in nature. As elsewhere in the source material, the American body is friendly and open, willingly offering up all the things that might pass through its hands. Natives disappear into the forest and reappear carrying game, honey, pineapples, and large stalks of bananas, all of which they exchange for the most useless of European baubles:

> They are very simple and honest, and generous with all they have; none of them refuses anything he possesses when he is asked for it, even more, he invites the asking. They show great love towards others in preference to themselves: they also give greatly in return for practically nothing.[139]

American bodies behave as "anti-civilians." Unencumbered by the demanding strictures of organized society, they fulfill at least two parts of the Pauline spiritual triumvirate of Charity, Hope, and Faith ("If only they had received other religion"). It is here where the physical landscape and the spiritual qualities of those populating it are

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[138] Peter Martyr, *Decades*, book I page 8 of the 1640 English translation (London: 1640).
[139] *Epistola Christofori Colom* (1493). The original text reads: "sunt admodum simplices ac bonae fidei, et in omnibus quae habent liberalissimi: roganti quod possidet inficiatur nemo, quin ipsi nos ad id poscendum invitant. Maximum erga omnes amorem prae se ferunt: dant quaeque magna pro parvis, minima licet re nihilove contenti."

metaphorically equated. A gradual poison has crept into Europe, and though its souls are saved, its bodies are heavily corrupted. The theme will be first presented by Jean de Léry before being thoroughly annexed by Montaigne. American society is thus more pure,

> …since they do not in any way drink of those murky, pestilential springs, from which flow so many streams of mistrust, avarice, litigation, squabbles, of envy and ambition, which eat away our bones, suck out our marrow, waste our bodies, and consume our spirits—in short, poison us and kill us off before our due time—nothing of all that torments them, much less dominates or obsesses them.[140]

It is an interesting (and loaded) train of logic, one that Léry employs too hastily: this analogy appears in the text of the *Histoire d'un Voyage* seven chapters before his discussion of the way in which the Tupinamba cook and eat their prisoners. But his newly figured equation (cannibals of the body<cannibals of the soul), will nevertheless resound all the way to Rousseau. It will be a tropological mutation of significant proportions, for until Léry, communist societies had paid dearly for their idyll; their harmony gruesomely attached to the "cursed practice," of eating one's neighbors. Civilization it would appear, had sacrificed an essential generosity in an attempt to channel a more noxious avarice—the taste for human flesh—into gentler channels. The trope had been proposed by Mandeville and is confirmed throughout the discovery texts. Although American bodies are eager to share with others, they are troublingly just as eager to consume them.

Historicizing a myth: American bodies in the French tradition

What has just been presented above is a loose outline; a general theoretic rumination progressed in hopes of better highlighting a few of the key elements composing a persistent

[140] Léry, 57.

sixteenth-century trope. Ultimately, such thematic analysis is not only warranted, but necessary, especially in a work of literary history concerned with the aesthetic power of its documents. However, such an exploration cannot stand by itself, for source material must be contextualized in order to reveal a meaningful thematic progression developing over time.

So far, a myth has been posited, but how does this myth translate into trope, and how does this trope evolve over the course of the sixteenth century? The answer, though complicated, can be discerned within several disparate, yet interconnected documents appearing from the middle of the fourteenth century to the end of the sixteenth. Though a general thematic evolution has already been alluded to, it serves to further historicize this process by isolating a few key texts and figures. In doing so, I will trace a specific tropic genealogy from Mandeville to Montaigne. Though not entirely linear, nor exclusively local, it helps to situate this chain of thematic transmission according to its progress within a particularly French tradition.[141]

By the mid fourteenth-century, all of the essential themes of Montaigne's landmark essay "Des Cannibales" had been arranged and set down. While the text of *Mandeville's Travels* has already been examined in more detail within a previous chapter, it serves here to reemphasize both its French origins, and the nature of one of its primary themes, namely that of the "cannibal idyll:" a communal and harmonious paradise society plagued by the "cursed practice" of anthropophagy. Here, a passage that has already been presented, bears duplication:

[141] This tradition is ultimately more linguistic (documents composed and disseminated in French) than proto-national (documents circulating throughout what is today France). Admittedly, this is a thin line to balance upon, but I feel that I am only bending, not breaking, my original promise to avoid the tyrannical clutch of the nation state as a primary site of historical inquiry.

> In that londe is fulle gret hete. And the custom thre is such that men and women gon alle naked, and thei scornen whan thei seen ony strange folk goynge clothed…And thei wedden there no wyfes, for all the wommen there ben comoun and thei forsake no man…and all the lond is comoun, for alle that a man holdeth o yeer, another man hath it another yeer. And euery man taketh what part that him lyketh. And also alle the godes of the lond ben comoun, cornes and alle other thinges, for nothing there is kept in clos ne nothing ther is vndur lok. And euvery man there taketh what he wole withouten ony contradiccoun, and als riche is o man there as is another. But in that countree there is a cursed custom, for thei eten more gladly mannes flesch than ony other flesch…[142]

This figuration, one that would be echoed time and again by Renaissance thinkers and artists fixated on the notion of a humanity's lost golden age, was almost certainly familiar to both Columbus and the author(s) who penned the notorious Vespucci letters.[143] While both source sets have already been sufficiently explored above, it serves to examine their popular transmission within Peter Martyr d'Angiera's *Decades* series.

Arguably the first European historian of the New World, the Italian humanist Peter Martyr attempted to compile all of the earliest material detailing the discovery of the Americas, first at the request of the cardinal of Aragon, and later as an official chronicler for the council of the Indies under Charles V. Although Martyr's work appears somewhat scattered and confused today, his *Decades* series (published intermittently from 1511 onwards) represents the first significant attempt to synthesize a wide range of voyager narratives provoked by the discovery of the New World. His work was widely published

[142] *Mandeville's Travels*, 132.
[143] Josephine Bennet, *The Rediscovery of Sir John Mandeville* (New York: MLA, 1954) 1.

during his lifetime and by 1533, a French translation of his first three decades had been published in Paris under the title *Extraict ou Recueil des Isles nouvellement trouvees en la grand mer Oceane.*[144]

While not the first work to introduce the word Cannibal into the French lexicon (Marthurin du Redouer's Vespucci translation had employed the word in 1517), Martyr's lurid account "was well calculated to afford the Cannibals some durable publicity."[145] In fact, the very same year the *Decades* appear in France (1533), one discovers the word in the pages of the anonymously published *Chroniques du grant Gargantua*, one in a series of counterfeit Gargantua books attempting to capitalize on Rabelais' success.[146] However, Martyr did more than just disseminate the rumor of New World anthropophagy, he further elucidated the specifics of a familiar trope. While his natives, like those of Mandeville, still partake in the "despicable" practice of consuming human flesh, the idyllic Caribbean society Martyr presents is provided with even greater detail: his natives not only commune harmoniously, they live "without enforcement of laws, without quarreling, judges, libels…"[147] Martyr likewise weighs the civil against the savage, and comes down on the side of civilization primarily due to his love of the "Christian faith." It is a notable instance of cultural juxtaposition, one that will become increasingly popular by the middle of the sixteenth century.

If Martyr popularized the image of the cannibal within France (or, at least, within a certain French intellectual milieu), then André Thevet did more than anyone else to provide

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[144] Frank Lestringant, *Cannibals*, trans. Rosemary Morris (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 32.
[145] Ibid., 17.
[146] Ibid., 33.
[147] For the full quotation plus citation, see above.

that image with a certain amount of "ethnographic veracity." Nevertheless, Thevet's contribution to the "cannibal idyll" trope is far more extensive than the brief chapter-length summary of the practice he published in his *Singularitez de la France Antarctique* (1557).[148] Perhaps, it is less Thevet himself even, and more those poets who were inspired by his account that add a new dimension to the cannibal theme. In "Complainte contre Fortune," a poem composed sometime around 1559, Pierre de Ronsard declares that he would "hazard his life on the fortunes of the wave" to arrive in Antarctic France where,

> An unknown people,
> Wander all innocent and fierce and nude,
> With customs nude, and denude of malice,
> Where the names of virtue and vice have never been heard,
> Nor those of Senate or King,
> Where they live according to their pleasure
> Carried on by the appetite of their first desire.[149]*

Ronsard goes on to speak of the "tranquil repose of the first life," and the general innocents of the Golden Age, a time free from "the suspicion of the law, that makes us live in fear."[150] For Ronsard, the arrival of Villegagnon signals the beginning of a new age of enmity,

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[148] Thevet's description of the Tupi, will receive much greater detail with the publication of his *Cosmographie Universelle* in 1575, but the descriptions found in the *Singularitez* (in all likelihood culled from the stories of other French visitors to Brazil and not firsthand experience) remain more encyclopedic, and therefore likely all the more credible to an audience of intellectuals trained to adhere not to the testimony of the eyewitness, but to the "textually sound" yet impersonal entries of a cosmographer.

[149] Pierre de Ronsard, *Complainte contre Fortune* (Paris: 1559). The translation is my own; the original text reads:

> *...où le people inconnu*
> *Erre innocentement tout farouche et tout nu,*
> *D'habits tout ainsi nu, qu'il est nu de malice,*
> *Qui ne connaît les noms de vertu, ni de vice,*
> *De Sénat, ni de Roi, qui vit à son plaisir*
> *Porté de l'appétit de son premier désir.*

Alas, if you teach them to conscript their borders,

to enlarge their fields, they will fall to waging war.

The trials will begin, friendship will fail,

And ambition will come to torment them,

As it does here, with our poor men,

Who are made so miserable by an excess of reason.

[whereas] they now live in an age of gold.[151]

Whether Ronsards complainte was directly incited by the mounting religious tension that would shortly explode into the *guerres de religion,* is difficult to assess. No doubt, some of Ronsard's anti-civil musing was aped—a reflection of his deep debt to a diverse array of earlier classical poets who made indictments of modern society a regular part of their work. What is clear, however, is that the American body took on distinctly Brazilian proportions within an increasingly diverse set of French texts by the late 1550s. Renaissance historian Tom Conley argues that there exists a meaningful interplay between imagined space and French poetry during the sixteenth century:

> In adapting classical sources to their own quasi-autobiographical enterprises the poets appear to be consubstantial with their poems. They explore sylvan and inhabited

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*A note on formatting: because I have translated the poem into blank verse in order to provide the best approximation of the original meaning of the document, I present it in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style's guidelines for such poetry (set to the left as opposed to centered).

[150] "*La frayeur de la loi, qui nous fait vivre en crainte*."

[151] The original text reads:

> *Las! Si tu leur apprends à limiter la terre,*
> *Pour agrandir leurs champs, ils se feront la guerre,*
> *Les process auront lieu, l'amitié défaudra,*
> *Et l'âpre ambition tourmenter les viendra,*
> *Comme elle fait ici nous autres pauvres hommes,*
> *Qui par trop de raison trop misérables sommes*.

> spaces as might an ethnographer who discovers alterity in a new world. The poet becomes an anthropologist when he describes familiar places in light of the novelty of oceanic discoveries.[152]

Such an observation is certainly meaningful here, for the poetic aspect of ethnographic description, particularly in regards to the early modern period, has received little comment. As a result, complicated linguistic figures and images have generally failed to receive the nuanced analysis they deserve. Beyond the political impetus behind New World descriptions lurks a more ambivalent (though not at all innocuous) understanding of distance and aesthetic. In coupling two imagined alien landscapes (the sylvan Golden Age of the classics and the exotic "cannibal shore" of America) Ronsard is not inadvertently sanctioning a colonial project by way of some type of sublime reversal—lyrically conscripting "marvelous possessions," so to speak—but is rather imaginatively crafting another world with which to examine his own. Thus the New World of the "Complainte" serves as a "magically real" social model from which to stage a rebuke of European decadence.

In the following chapter, I will explore these themes in far greater detail, but for now it is enough to simply point to all the multiple ways in which American depictions *without* colonial impetus were being employed throughout Europe. It is also necessary to historicize this descriptive process by contextualizing it in relation to the social friction developing within French society at the time, for poetic images of the Golden Age often accompanied other socially charged poetry relating to the *guerres of religion*.[153] Throughout this period,

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[152] Tom Conley, "Ronsard on Edge: 'Les Amours d'Eurymédon et Callirée,'" *The New Centennial Review* 2:1 (2002): 35.
[153] See, Samuel Junod, "La Poétique de l'enrollement au temps des guerres de religion," *MLN* 120 Supplement (2005): S44-S59.

contemporary social strife was becoming a greater theme in both literature and political polemic. A turbulent economy only further agitated a society struggling to redefine its identity in the wake of the reformation, and artists and intellectuals increasingly sought to locate themselves within a rapidly altering Euro-imperial landscape that now included an alien continent (for by this time the dimensions of the Americas had come into greater focus).[154]

Increasingly, the violence being perpetrated within the borders of France and that perceived in the Americas was analyzed according to comparative notions of regional, national, and cultural dispositions. Not only was France embroiled in a tumultuous religious civil war, but it was also gradually searching for ways to distinguish itself from its neighbors. By the 1570s, anti-Italian and Spanish stereotypes had slowly mingled with similar rumors of New World turpitude and bloodlust. In Jean Bodin's *Six Livres de la Republique* (1576), for example, Brazilians, who are "not content to eat their enemies, unless they also bathe their little children in their blood," are grouped with other Mediterranean peoples, who also presumably lack the ability to control the passions incited by hot climates.[155] In all likelihood, Bodin was pulling his knowledge of the Americas from Thevet's *Cosmographie Universelle,* a massive tome of upwards of a thousand pages which had been published just a

[154] For more on monetary flux and its effect on French life during the last twenty-five years of the sixteenth century, see Jotham Parsons, "Governing Sixteenth-Century France: The Monetary Reforms of 1577," *French Historical Studies* 26:1 (Winter, 2003) 2-29. Not only were New World depictions affected by the religious wars, French travel literature in general seems to have become increasingly politicized during this time. Marcus Keller notes that the famous French traveler Nicolas de Nicolay utilized his image of the Orient to advocate a specific political agenda back home, an agenda stressing both tolerance and moderation. Marcus Keller, Nicolas de Nicolay's "Navigations and the Domestic Politics of Travel Writing," *L'Esprit Créateur* 48:1 (2008): 18-31.
[155] *Les Six Livres de la Republique* (Paris: 1576), Book V. For more on the "melancholy cannibal" see Lestringant, *Cannibals,* 86-93. For more on Jean Bodin's conception of climatic determinism, see Marian J. Tooley, "Bodin and the Medieval Theory of Climate," *Speculum* 28:1 (Jan. 1953): 64-83.

year earlier. Ultimately, it was the seventeenth chapter of Thevet's cosmography, one that treated the colonial episode in Antarctic France, that would prove the most controversial.

Three years after the publication of the *Cosmographie,* Calvinist minister Jean de Léry, incensed over Thevet's characterization of Admiral Villegagnon and the realities of Tupi life in Brazil, published his *Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre de la Bresil*. The account of Léry's journey to Guanabara—one completed more than twenty years earlier—stands as one of the most remarkable works of sixteenth-century discovery literature. Unlike previous reports from the Americas, Léry made his own personal experience paramount; and throughout the pages of the *Histoire,* the Calvinist provides an eye-witness testimony, an intimate portrait detailing the practices of the Tupi people in which his own unique gaze is continually reaffirmed. The book was a revelation, a statement that should in no way be understood as hyperbole.

Less than fifty years earlier, the first three books of Peter Martyr's *Decades* had appeared in France. While the books had incited a wave of curiosity, they failed to present anything but vague and rough depictions of native life. What Léry provided less than half a century later was an in-depth and carefully constructed narrative in which the supposed "horrors" of the Americas were deftly juxtaposed against the violence unfolding all across France. If Ronsard's "Complainte contre: Fortune suggested an anxious shift in French sentiment, then Léry's work not only confirms this shift, but capably weaves such anxieties into a recognizably new mode of rhetoric. The theme of "cannibal idyll" that we have traced from Mandeville to Bodin is suddenly refigured in the pages of Léry's precocious ethnography.

Two years later, Montaigne would present his landmark essay “Des Cannibales,” (1580) a meticulously understated indictment of the social corruption the essayist perceived sweeping across his native land. In the space of roughly a dozen pages, a dominant theme is dramatically inverted: the cannibal receives a well-crafted apology, and France is asked to reconsider its civil values in the face of twenty years of unprecedented religious strife. It is a bold request, one that Montaigne delivers in typical style—managing to sound simultaneously smug and poignant as he builds his case for the American cannibal. The move is undoubtedly facilitated by the “discursive escape” attempted in the pages of the fiercely original *Histoire d’un voyage*. In the short space of two years, a trope was successfully re-imagined as the cannibal alien was suddenly juxtaposed with the cannibal idem; which is not to suggest something as predictable as “the monster in the mirror” but rather to suggest a moment of more nuanced reflection in which the symbolic mechanics of a culturally posited relationship began to fail.

Chapter 4

Sanitizing the Cannibal: Refiguring a Theme

Sometime in the 1580s, an illustration was produced by Martin de Vos and J.B. Vrints at Flanders in which a remarkable scene is depicted in mannerist style. On a beach lies a monstrous fish vomiting up smaller fish that in turn vomit up still smaller fish themselves. With the help of ladders, four ax wielding fisherman have climbed atop this sea monster, apparently with the intention of hacking it to pieces. The fish's belly, swollen with prey, has already been split, and from the gash spills forth a motley pile of marine life (these creatures also vomit up others). Nearby, a boat weighed down with a large catch comes to shore, but not before its oarsman is caught in the jaws of yet another sea monster (perhaps the mate of the first). In the background, a handful of European soldiers fire their rifles into a group of bow wielding natives. An odd scene to be sure, but it is the foreground of the illustration which is so interesting, for in the lower right hand corner, a cannibal feast is being staged. Five nude figures gather around a fire, one woman holds a child, another chews on the fingertips of a severed hand. The men, meanwhile, tend to the boucan – one is repositioning a forearm, another is about to deliver a blow to the back of a knee. The makeshift wooden grill the cannibals have assembled looks remarkably similar to one depicted some twenty-five years earlier in Andre Thevet's Singularitez de la France Antarctique. While the illustration presents a wealth of possible interpretations, it is ultimately the caption accompanying the scene that is so notable: "The oppressor of the widow and orphan is crueler than these."

It is but one line of text that transforms an American barbeque into a scathing piece of social commentary. The allegorical move employed visually by de Vos and Vrints had been supplied just years earlier in the pages of Jean de Léry's Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre

de la Brésil. In 1578, the Calvinist pastor, his memory fresh with so many images of domestic carnage and intercine violence, soberly reminded all of Europe that civility is less a matter of place than of practice:

> So let us henceforth no longer abhor so very greatly the cruelty of the anthropophagous—that is, man-eating savages. For since there are some here in our midst even worse and more detestable than those who, as we have seen, attack only enemy nations, while the ones over here have plunged into the blood of their own kinsmen, neighbors, and compatriots, one need not go beyond one's own country, nor as far as America, to see such monstrous and prodigious things.[156]

It is a stroke of rhetorical brilliance that Michel de Montaigne, himself a long sufferer of the guerres de religion, will seize and exploit masterfully in his celebrated "Des Cannibales." Suddenly, the moral of the cannibal idyll is inverted; in a moment with profound implications, the American body and all the sublime terror charging its mythology rush to the service of allegory. If Léry and Montaigne are any indication, it seems that some of France's sharpest minds had grown bored with a rapidly aging figure. Close to a century had passed since the discovery of the New World, and Europe had grown accustomed to its imagery. The exotic had become familiar, and descriptions that had once conveyed all the thrill and horror obscured within an alien geography had become worn and predictable—a mythology had ceased to function.

What Léry accomplishes in his Histoire is difficult to assess, for we are still too close to his text to provide it with a fully detached and cool appraisal. Levi-Strauss—a thinker who arguably did more to shape postwar Western theory than any other twentieth century

[156] Léry, *History of a Voyage*, 133.

intellectual—made of the book a breviary; which is not to suggest that we cannot succeed where The Structuralist failed, but it is to suggest that the influence exerted by the Histoire is still very immediate. Yet, Léry's account did not retire a mythology so much as it refigured one. If the book feels uncannily modern, it is not because Léry was working outside the representational strictures of his time, but because his text is one of the quieter entries in a series of works forestaging modernity. As such, to fully decode Léry would mean deciphering so many of the functional symbols and patterns of our own thought.

All of which is not to dehistoricize the legacy of the Histoire; staunchly Calvinist and passionately anti-Catholic, the work is very much a product of its time. Nevertheless, the book's author seems to have presaged a cultural zeitgeist that would not fully arrive for another twenty years.[157] Like all good cultural prophets, Léry was not unbound from the discursive reality of his milieu; he was just more sensitive to the rhetorical mechanics informing its trajectory. A careful examination of his text reveals an acute awareness of the power of tropes and tropic reversals. Unlike his cosmographer rivals André Thevet and Francois Belleforest, Léry was unauthorized to transmit his knowledge encyclopedically. As a pastor, Léry's story unfolds as personal parable. Perhaps following Staden's example, he provides a tale of trial and salvation, and his narrative is not that far removed from that of hagiography: by the time he told his story in 1578, it had already appeared in Jean Crespin's Actes de Martyrs, in a section dedicated to those Protestants persecuted in France

[157] The zeitgeist referred to might be thought of as the general intellectual movement towards the celebration of personal experience and the appearance of an embryonic empiricist method in the sciences. This movement is exemplified by a diverse array of thinkers including: Bacon; Descartes; Galileo; Leibnitz; William Harvey; and Robert Boyle and his affiliates in the so-called "Invisible College."

Antarctique.[158] Like his thirteenth-century missionary counterpart William of Rubric, Léry turns a careful and hungry eye to everything around him, "we have yet to see more fully" he intones in the eighth chapter of his Histoire. If he manages to "see more fully," it is because he understands not only the gaze as it is cast, but the gaze as it returns. As Michel de Certeau notes, Léry's is a cyclical journey, both geographically and philosophically:

> His is a reverse pilgrimage: far from rejoining the referential body of an orthodoxy (the sacred city, the tomb, the basilica), his itinerary goes from the center to the borders, in searching for a space where he can find a ground. Upon that ground he envisions building the language of a new – a reformed – conviction. At the end of his journey, after all the comings and goings, the Savage is invented.[159]

Does Jean de Léry invent the savage? No, we cannot agree with Certeau on this point; rather, Léry questions the authority of Home—not home as Europe, France, or Geneva, but home as a place circumscribed against all that is outside. Unlike Staden, Léry's God does not wrench him from the clutch of the heathen in order to deposit him securely on familiar ground, but instead throws him into the midst of a bloody and protracted religious civil war ignorant of topography. The Savage is not invented, rather, he is simply refigured, given weight, made to move. Previous European's had discoursed at length on the difference between here and there. But until Léry, the "accursed practice" of consuming one's neighbors had always sanctioned the legitimacy of Here. It is Léry who reassesses the measures—the narrative journey contained in his Histoire serves as his fulcrum.

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[158] Jean Crespin, *Actes des Martyrs* (Geneva: 1564) the sections on Léry and Antarctic France can be found after the 1572 Geneva publication.

[159] Michel de Certeau, "Ethno-Graphy" in *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 213.

Dressing the American Body: Léry and narrative positionality

"Imagine" says Léry, and this one word segregates the Histoire from every other work detailing New World discovery. "Imagine in the first place a naked man, well formed and proportioned in his limbs, with all the hair on his body plucked out…"[160]—Léry does not inform, he invites. The reader of the Histoire is not expected to defer to the arcanum of the cosmographer, but is instead asked to perform: "Imagine," says Léry, and "you will see him." In an incredible passage of the text, Léry guides the reader carefully through a description of Tupi fashion. "For the second contemplation of the savage," he writes after describing the first illustrative plate accompanying his 1578 publication, "remove all the flourishes described above," –the reader expects a new description, but is required to work for it:

> …after rubbing him with a glutinous [sic] gum, cover his whole torso, arms, and legs with little feathers minced fine, like red-dyed down; when you have made him artificially hairy with this fuzzy down, you can imagine what a fine fellow he is.[161]

The reader is no longer being treated to a strict description, but has instead been handed, via the imagination of the author, some kind of Tupi doll to dress according to his orders. The move is bizarre—intimate, a moment of jouissance in a text filled with sensual images. Léry continues,

> In the third place, whether he remains in his natural color, or whether he is painted or covered with feathers, attire him again in his garments, headdresses and bracelets so laboriously wrought of these beautiful natural feathers of various colors that I have

[160] Léry, 62.
[161] Ibid., 64.

> described to you; when he is thus outfitted, you might say that he is in his full Papal splendor.[162]

Here, Léry delivers one of many religious jabs at the Church. Unlike his contemporaries, Léry understands cultural difference as a function of religious difference. If the Tupi are "fine fellows," it is because they are not garishly bedazzled Catholics or vicious Atheist "monstres." If the ostentatious regalia of the Tupi is innocent regalia, it is because Léry perceives in it no religious significance beyond that which he can employ rhetorically (i.e. against Catholics and Atheists). Léry progresses his description with a humorous twist:

> For the fourth description, leave him half-naked and half-dressed, in the way I have described him; give him the breeches and jackets of our colored cloth, with one of the sleeves green and the other yellow; you will judge that he no longer needs anything but a fool's bauble.[163]

How exactly Léry understands the place of the fool in European culture is something that simply should not be speculated about here. Although Léry no doubt sets the Tupi up as an effective foil against all that he finds detestable in Europe, it would be too great of a leap to suggest that the Tupi operate in the text of the Histoire in the role of some kind of collectively-organized exterior jester; however, the parallels should be noted and might deserve greater exploration elsewhere. Léry concludes his depiction exotically: [164]

> Finally, if you add to these the instrument called the maraca in his hand, the plumed harness that they call araroye on his hips, and his rattles made of fruits around his

[162] Ibid., 64.
[163] Ibid., 64.
[164] However, not in the text of this essay.

> legs, you will then see him (as I will show him again later) equipped as he is when he dances, leaps, drinks and capers about.[165]

A description has been accomplished by means of an incredibly unique literary device. For the briefest moment, no more than the space of a page, the perspective of the narrative veers dangerously close to that of the second person. It is a strange sort of accomplishment in the history of sixteenth-century discovery literature, almost akin to those directions offered to religious pilgrims in much earlier travel narratives: "go to the gate of X and you shall find, ten more miles and you will see…" Nowhere else in early descriptions of the Americas is such a highly personalized account rendered of native dress. The ethnographic detail, while intricate, is ultimately less interesting than the gesture Léry accomplishes by imaginatively offering his reader a Tupi body not "taller, fatter or smaller in stature than we Europeans are."[166] It is an honest move (although not an entirely humanizing one), a move that suggests that Léry valued veracity above sensation.

Before, native bodies had been described at a distance. Thevet, for example, had compiled and utilized various sailors' reports to construct the image of the Tupi he had provided in his Singularitez; likewise, the text of his Cosmographie Universelle proved even more clipped and culled. Hans Staden, on the other side of the imaginative spectrum, was ultimately more concerned with the preservation of his own body than he was about describing those of his Tupi captors. Léry, however, delivers up something entirely original, something reflective and deliberate, not a narrative of a Frenchman in America, but a narrative of a twenty-four year old Calvinist pastor amongst the Tupinamba of Guanabara

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[165] Ibid., 64.
[166] Ibid., 56.

bay. His account is introspective and nuanced, revealing in its pages the twenty years of reflection that went into its making.[167]

The ethnographic sublime: Remembering Guanabara

"Is such distortion commonplace? Can it be that pleasure makes us objective"

The Pleasure of the Text[168]

What exactly is the ethnographic impulse? Can it be historically defined, and if so, is it given birth, or at least first voice in Léry. If the answer to the former question is a desire to provide a detailed description of the practice, maintenance, and understanding of an alien culture, than the answer to the latter question is negative, for we have already encountered the meticulous report of William of Rubric. However, if one thinks of ethnography as the temporary displacement of a cultural locus accomplished through the narrative presentation of a text, then Léry does provide us with a of point of departure. What is presented in the Histoire is a quiet demand, the demand to "go and see;" (even if this move is only accomplished imaginatively). It is not enough that Léry should offer up his own account, others must follow so that his experience might be replicated and confirmed:

> …when I lived in that country, I took such care in observing all of them, great and small, that even now it seems to me that I have them before my eyes, and I will forever have the idea and image of them in my mind. But their gestures and expressions are so completely different from ours, that it is difficult, I confess, to

[167] As Janet Whatley so beautifully puts it: "The *Histoire* is…an account of a long initiation, telling us the price of direct knowledge of the New World: what it costs in hunger, thirst, vertigo, disgust, fear, embarrassment, and the risked loss of self-definition. Implicit in that telling is a demonstration of the ways in which the initiatory experience affects the power and the desire to impress, to leave a mark."
Janet Whatley, "Impression and Initiation: Jean de Léry's Brazil Voyage," Modern Language Studies, 19:3 (Summer, 1989): 15-25.

[168] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 32.

> represent them well by writing or by pictures. To have the pleasure of it, then you will have to go see and visit them in their own country.[169]

Perhaps here, Léry goes one step further than the ethnographer, for he lays no authoritative claim upon the knowledge he has extracted from Elsewhere. As medium, he is not confident in his ability to adequately define all that he encounters. "To have the pleasure of it, then you will have to go and see." –Léry, it seems, is not jealous of his exotica.

The Histoire is a partisan text, of that there can be no doubt. But just whose side is the author on? Is he for true speech? If so, whose vision of reality does his truth correspond to?—Obviously, not to the reality of the cosmographers, or the Church, or Villegagnon. Is Jean de Léry's truth an egalitarian truth? No, for he hates the Atheists far more than he hates the Church, and he despises the Norman sailors—freely carousing amongst the natives—far more than he despises André Thevet. A Calvinist truth seems to be the best answer, but then, what is a Calvinist truth? A long and thoughtful response has already been provided by Frank Lestringant in two works detailing the relationship of faith, colony, and description; however, to delve deeper here would be impractical.[170] So a Calvinist truth is posited, but will not be pursued within these pages. Instead, Léry's truth will be explored as an individual truth, not because Léry was an individualist, libertine, nihilist, or any other particularly inspired brand of free thinker, but because he recorded an experience that seems to have pushed him outside the framework of his orthodoxy. While his text is peppered with allusions to scripture, Calvin, the classics, and the narratives of other New World chroniclers, during his most

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[169] Léry, 67.
[170] Frank Lestringant, *Le Hugeunot et le Sauvage: L'Amerique et la controverse colonial, en France, au temps des Guerres de Religion* (1555-1589), (Paris: Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1990); and *Une sainte horreur, ou, Le voyage en eucharistie: XVIe-XVIII e siecle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996).

intense moments of recall, his cultural rubric seems to fail, leaving Léry grasping for adequate metaphors that never fully materialize.

As such, no pure Protestant ethics ever develops within the text of the Histoire. The account is the work of a staunch Calvinist, but it is not a Calvinist account. Instead, those memories that Léry relates with the most pleasure and relish secure, if ever so briefly, the moment of discursive rupture that allows him to forge something new. In one particularly lyrical depiction of a Tupi ceremony ("a witches' Sabbath"), Léry defies historical expectation by relating not a scene of pagan debauch, but a scene of enchantment and wonder:

> These ceremonies went on for nearly two hours, with the five or six hundred men dancing and singing incessantly; such was their melody that—although they do not know what music is—those who have not heard them would never believe that they could make such harmony… I had been somewhat afraid; now I received in recompense such joy, hearing the measured harmonies of such a multitude, and especially in the cadence and refrain of the song, when at every verse all of them would let their voices trail, saying Heu, heuaure, heura, heuraure, heura, heura, oueh—I stood there transported with delight. Whenever I remember it, my heart trembles, and it seems their voices are still in my ears.[171]

It is a memory of dislocation and surprise, one that affects Léry so profoundly precisely because it is so unexpected. It is a moment swiftly moralized by the Calvinist, who intently dissects the stories in the songs revealed to him by his interpreter. A flood, it seems, "had swelled so high that all the earth was covered." This deluge is immediately recognizable as

[171] Léry, 144.

the same that occurred "in the time of Noah," transposed and corrupted by bad transmission. The moral is, unsurprisingly, a historical one:

> In keeping with the habit of men, which is always to corrupt the truth and turn it into falsehood, together with what we have already seen – that, being altogether deprived of writing, it is hard for them to retain things in their purity – they have added this fable (as did the poets), that their ancestors took refuge in the trees.

But the moral comes too late; within the relation of the Tupi ceremony is an explication that betrays the ambivalent curiosity of remembrance not analysis—the pleasure one takes in having been somewhere else in time, a place where one can project oneself and reflect without being subject to the physical strictures and moral dictates of either past or present. Perhaps the act of memory itself posits some kind of temporal mirroring location: the (re)construction of a utopia (a placeless place: i.e. the irretrievable past) accomplished from a heterotopia (the liminal staging ground of the present). Within the space of his text (the graphic distillation of the memory act), Léry is simultaneously here and there; paradoxically able to assess where he is (war torn France), by way of where he was (Guanabara). Foucault personalizes this reflection process by imagining himself in the mirror:

> I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent… I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am.[172]

[172] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec *Diacritics*, Vol. 16 No. 1 (Spring, 1986), 5.

It is in this poetic conceptualization of space (temporal, physical, and ontological), that seems to be operating within the pages of the Histoire. It is in his most intense recollections of sublimity: of singing, warfare, play, and even in the remembrance of Tupi bodies, that incite Lery to reflection. Ironically (or perhaps not so ironically) it is likewise in these brief expressions of delight where Léry begins to develop an ethics of relation. Throughout the text, at the moment the exotic is eroticized, Léry is almost always provoked to provide a cultural juxtaposition, almost as if to apologize for the pleasure he is taking in his descriptions.

Take, for example, his extended discussion of Tupi nudity in the eighth chapter of his account. After the startlingly imaginative description of native men (already explored above), he goes on to wonder at the nakedness of the local women:

> but among other things doubly strange and marvelous that I observed in these Brazilian women, there is this: although they do not paint their bodies, arms, thighs, and legs as often as the men do, and do not cover themselves with feathers… it has never been in our power to make them wear clothes: to such a point were they resolved (and I think they have not changed their minds) not to allow anything at all on their bodies… whenever they come upon springs and clear rivers, crouching on the edge or else getting in, they throw water over their heads with both hands, and wash themselves and plunge in with their whole bodies like ducks—on some days more than a dozen times[173]

His sense of curious delight surfaces again just a paragraph below in his description of Tupi children:

[173] Léry, 66.

> As for the children above the age of three of four years, I especially took great pleasure in watching the little boys, whom they call conomi-miri; plump and chubby (much more so than those over here), with their bodkins of white bone in their split lips, the hair shaved in their style, and sometimes with their bodies painted, they never failed to come dancing out in a troop to meet us when they saw us arrive…it was great sport to see this swarm of naked little rascals stamping on the earth and scratching it like rabbits.[174]

After providing the most detailed, but more importantly highly personal, description of native bodies encountered in the sixteenth century, he finishes by providing just one in a long series of ethical juxtapositions in which the customs of the New World are set squarely against those of the Old:

> But what I have said about these savages is to show that, while we condemn them so austerely for going about shamelessly with their bodies entirely uncovered, we ourselves, in the sumptuous display, superfluity, and excess of our own costume, are hardly more laudable… I would to God that each of us dressed modestly, and more for decency and necessity than for glory and worldliness.[175]

The American body is thus provided with a new rhetorical function. Before, depictions of alterity had frequently served to illustrate all the ways that civility curtailed the natural impulse of unorganized humanity. According to the previous logic, if native bodies share, then they do so to an unhealthy extent: their communism is pressed to the point of cannibalism. If they lust casually, it is at the risk of their vitality: "many remain eunuchs,"

[174] Ibid., 67.
[175] Ibid., 69.

warns Vespucci. Civilization, as it functions in the earliest voyager ethics, checks the limits of desire, and in doing so secures the future of the community.

Léry, however, is the first to fully present the American physical body as a foil to that of the European social body. His savage is incorporated—functioning as a collective trope. For Léry, the American body symbolizes all that Europe has neglected to the point of corruption. This body is, "stronger, more robust and well filled-out, more nimble, less subject to disease."[176] It is a trope that he perfects in his discussion of cannibalism.

The Cannibal autre vs. The Cannibal idem

Within the text of the Histoire, Tupi bodies engaged in warfare are even more highly erotized than Tupi bodies at play. When one reads Léry's descriptions of violence, one is met with the figuring of what postmodern theorists might term the "horrible sublime." The combat is "cruel and terrible beyond belief," and the combatants "fight with such a fury that madmen could do no worse."[177] Léry's descriptions are filled with animal similes: "like mad dogs biting the pieces;" the arrows are "as thick as flies;" enemy Margaia warriors are struck to the ground by their killers "as our butchers fell oxen."[178] But despite the "terrifying" nature of the violence, Léry is enchanted, "I have never taken so much pleasure in seeing the infantry, with their gilded helmets and shining arms, as I delighted then in seeing those savages do battle."[179]

In the text of the Histoire, fear is refigured as lyric. Recently, Slavoj Žižek has proposed a concept of love as a devouring force, a spiritual lacuna that must be filled by any

[176] Ibid., 56.
[177] Ibid., 118.
[178] Ibid., 118.
[179] Ibid., 118.

means necessary.[180] One can perhaps translate the concept in order to better understand the germination of the early ethnographic impulse. After all, what is the ethnographer if not the embodiment of some bizarre cultural excess of love, equaled in passion only be the humanitarian (is it any surprise that the two are becoming increasingly indistinguishable in our own time?). No matter where one attempts to parse the two, both ultimately end up partaking in the same cultural violence.[181] One is reminded of Clifford Geertz' fictional Napoleon Chagnon, "stripped to his drawers, decorated with feathers, dancing and chanting, and drugged out of his skull on local hallucinogens, break[ing] arrows over his head as he ritually 'kills' a terrified small boy."[182] Léry, although resisting whatever urge drove Chagnon to actively embrace the violence surrounding him, nevertheless, celebrates it lyrically,

> There was not only the entertainment of seeing them leap, whistle, and wield their swords so dexterously in circles and passades; it was also a marvel to see so many arrows fly in the air and sparkle in the sunbeams with their grand featherings of red, blue, green, scarlet, and other colors, and so many robes, headdresses, bracelets, and other adornments of these natural feathers with which the savages were arrayed.[183]

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[180] See Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Big Ideas/Small Books* (New York: Picador, 2008). One is highly encouraged to visit youtube.com and type in "Žižek love is evil." If anything, for one's own personal amusement.

[181] This "cultural violence" should not be moralized, it is not a matter of right or wrong, Left or Right, good or evil—it is simply the inevitable confrontation that marks any cultural encounter. Certain elements of less nuanced Postcolonial thought, so often concerned with ill-defined (and undeniably European) notions of justice and parity, often flounder when they fail to account for the dynamic yet inherently destructive nature of all discursive mingling.

[182] Geertz' fictional Chagnon is, of course, only a parody of Patrick Tierney's Chagnon. Either way, we are left with a wonderful image, a piece of superb "hysterical realism," that ably hyperbolizes perceptions concerning the nastier side of anthropology. For more, one is encouraged to read Geertz' cryptic tour de force review of Patrick Tierney's *Darkness in Eldorado: How Scientists and Journalists Devastated the Amazon*, Clifford Geertz, "Life Among the Anthros" *The New York Review of Books* Feb. 8, 2001.

[183] Léry,120.

Léry's description continues, and his discussion of anthropophogy is incomparably more intense than either that of Hans Staden or André Thevet. Those who are captured in battle are subject to the boucan, but not before they participate in an elaborate cannibal ritual, a "strange tragedy," that Léry describes in vivid detail. The cannibal impulse is driven by a desire for revenge that Léry equates to the political cruelty practiced by the disciples of Machiavelli ("with whom France, to her great misfortune, is now filled."). The refusal to forgive causes one to revel "in the devil's nature," and such barbarians "show their hearts to be more cruel and malign than those of tigers."[184]

For his presentation of the cannibal ritual, Léry, somewhat uncharacteristically, revives an old trope, that of the insatiable American appetite. Like earlier depictions, it is the voracity of the female that Léry most emphasizes. The adoptive wife of the prisoner will be the "first to eat him," after shedding "a few feigned tears."[185] The appetite of the wife is outdone only by those of the oldest women who, "more covetous of eating human flesh than the young ones, incessantly importune all those who have prisoners to dispatch them quickly." The role of the elderly woman—so hostile to popular perceptions concerning ageless American bodies—is one that shows up in both Thevet and Claude D'abbeville, and one so persistent in the illustrations of Theodor de Bry that Bernadette Bucher devotes an entire chapter of her study of Theodor de Bry's the Great Voyages to the concept.[186] For the Tupi at large, the consumption of flesh is primarily ritual ("more out of vengeance") but the old women consider the victim "a delicacy."[187]

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[184] Ibid., 112.
[185] Ibid., 126.
[186] See chapter five, Bernadette Bucher, "The Old Tupinamba Cannibals," in *Icon and Conquest: A Structural Analysis of the Illustrations of de Bry's* Great Voyages.
[187] Léry, Histoire, 127.

A certain level of frisson accompanies these depictions, and one is justified in believing that Léry intentionally depicts his cannibals with such relish in order to prime the reader for the reversal he is about to accomplish. The cannibals "lick their fingers," after "inciting their children to share in their vengefulness," by rubbing "their bodies, arms, thighs and legs with the blood of their enemies."[188]After dismembering the body and stocking the fires, they gather "joyfully around the boucans, on which they gaze with a furious and covetous eye."[189] Léry makes no apologies for his cannibals, neither attempting to claim that the practice is one of necessity ("Not, however…that they regard this as nourishment"), nor that it is tamer than his contemporaries had described it:

> And in fact, to satisfy their ferocity, everything that can be found in the bodies of such prisoners, from the tips of the toes up to the nose, ears, and scalp, is entirely eaten by them…by pursuing the dead and gnawing them right down to the bone, they will strike fear and terror into the hearts of the living.[190]

Yet, Léry pulls an about face, "it seems to me that what I have said is enough to horrify you, indeed, to make your hair stand on end. Nevertheless…"—it is this Nevertheless, that Léry contributes to the greater discourse surrounding the American body, it is this crucial ideological conjunction that he lends to Montaigne:

> Nevertheless, so that those who read these horrible things, practiced daily among these barbarous nations of the land of Brazil, may also think more carefully about the things that go on every day over here, among us…[191]

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[188] Ibid., 126.
[189] Ibid., 127.
[190] I quote here out of order beginning at the ellipsis, Ibid., 127.
[191] Ibid., 132.

It is certainly a moment of cultural reflection provoked by years of strife and insecurity, after two decades of witnessing "that execrable butchery of the French people," Léry was ready for such a daring cultural juxtaposition. "One need not go beyond one's own country, nor as far as America, to see such monstrous and prodigious things," Léry assures his reader. [192] In his preface he is even more philosophical, "one certainly cannot deny that as natural men they have that disposition and inclination common to all." What is "common" is to understand something greater than man, a trick which depends upon a notion of "good and evil."[193] However, the cannibal other, though naturalized, is not granted parity with European man; the savage is still a savage, and what is more, still a trope, but a trope that can function as moral sanction,

> …consider what our big usurers do, sucking blood and marrow, and eating everyone alive—widows, orphans, and other poor people, whose throats it would be better to cut once and for all, than to make them linger in misery—you will say that they are even more cruel than the savages I speak of . And that is why the prophet says that such men flay the skin of God's people, eat their flesh, break their bones and chop them in pieces as for the pot, and as flesh within the cauldrons.[194]

The reference is to Micah 3:3, an indictment against those of the house of Jacob who "hate the good, and love the evil," those men, according to the prophet, are the ones ripe for judgment. One is referred back to the discussion of the Martin de Vos illustration that began this chapter, "the oppressor of the widow and orphan is crueler than these." It is in the 1580s that the American body becomes a popular locus of allegory. It is in this decade that an

[192] Ibdi., 132.
[193] Ibid., lix.
[194] Ibdi., 132.

increasing number of metaphors and visual representations are devoted to the concept of America as body. Shortly after his illustration discussed above, Martin de Vos would provide his own illustration of the "Cannibal Queen,"—the American continent personified as a woman stripped to the waist atop the back of a giant armadillo. De Vos' allegory represents only one mode of romanticizing the American body—yet another mutation will be accomplished philosophically.

"Men fresh from the hands of the gods": Sanitizing Léry

Montaigne, unlike Léry does not speak of savages; rather, he speaks of nations. No one nation in particular just "these nations." Thankfully, he supplies an extended list detailing all the particulars: no manner of traffic; no knowledge of letters; no science of numbers; no name of magistrate or of political superiority; no use of servitude, riches or poverty; no contracts; no successions; no dividing of properties, no employments (except for those of leisure); no respect of kindred (except for the common bond); no clothing, no agriculture, no metal, no use of wheat or wine; no words to signify lying, treachery, dissimulation, avarice, envy detraction, or pardon—in short, "men fresh from the hands of the gods."[195]

Montaigne's American body, while inspired by Léry's, is perhaps most akin to that of Albrecht Dürer, for it is masterfully depicted—the rendition of an artist not an ethnographer. "Des Cannibales" is an iconic essay, one intricately associated with the birth of modernity as an eloquent defense of what the modern critic will be tempted to describe as "cultural relativism." Throughout the text, Montaigne's rhetorical artifice far outstrips Léry's. His cannibal is neither terrible nor ferocious, but a paragon of distance, a pure body unfamiliar

[195] This list is paraphrased from the 1958 translation of the text by Donald Frame. Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford University Press, 1958), 153.

with the cocktail of social poisons infecting late sixteenth-century Europe. Montaigne speaks of the gratification of "corrupted taste," all that has rendered Europe adverse to the clarity of nature, "we have so overloaded the beauty and richness of her works by our inventions that we have quite smothered her."[196] Montaigne does not so much distill Léry's vision as much as he sanitizes it. Bodies that had been dangerously close to coming to life in Léry, are thus tamed and made safe for popular circulation in "Des Cannibales."

Does Montaigne believe in his cannibals? Perhaps, but not as much as he believes in the rhetorical thrust of his essay. The plagiarisms are too obvious to suggest that he lacked more lurid material to enhance his short depiction of native life. Compare this lyrical apology for New World cannibalism to the one issued by Léry just two years earlier (and quoted above):

> I am not sorry that we notice the barbarous horror of such acts, but I am heartily sorry that, judging their faults rightly, we should be so blind to our own. I believe there is more barbarity in eating a man alive than in eating him dead, in tearing by tortures and the rack a body still full of feeling, in roasting him bit by bit, in having him bitten and mangled by dogs and swine… than in roasting and eating him after he is dead.[197]

Clearly, this is, at the very least, an exceptionally strong echo of Léry's own juxtaposition. The question of plagiarism is, of course, purely one of literary analysis. In an age when authors regularly lifted and paraphrased passages from their source material, no one would have accused Montaigne of pilfering intellectual property.[198] What makes Montaigne's role

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[196] Ibid., 152.
[197] Ibid., 155.
[198] It should be noted the Montaigne—despite libeling criticism at the genre of cosmography—pulls from a wide range of sources to produce his American ethnography. As Tom Conley comments of the construction of the essay thus, "…its most reliable sources were often the very cosmographers it called into question. The more

so significant in this thematic shift is his uncanny ability to dehumanize the American body precisely at the moment when it could have potentially emerged as a recognizably human figure. Much like Las Casas, Montaigne's native is no longer ethically implicated, but it is precisely this insistence on the intrinsic innocence of his subject that renders that subject less visible. A myth that Léry had placed in danger—the myth of the monstrous savage—is thus totally inverted and therefore preserved in the form of the noble savage (a trope which we will return to shortly).

If anything, Montaigne's cannibal is even less familiar than that of André Thevet. The Franciscan had perceived an America populated by bestial degenerates, but his depiction of Brazil and its inhabitants was framed utilizing basic human impulses—lust, sloth, fear, voracity—impulses that would have been recognizable to a European audience. In Les Signularitez and the Cosmographie Universelle civilized man, though wild and disconcerting, is still a sympathetic figure. Montaigne, however, takes the most persistent myths of the New World, guts them of any negative implications, and refigures them as virtues.

Men, for example, have multiple wives, not because natives are lascivious pagans unacquainted with the sacrament of marriage, but because their wives are so generous and so desirous of company that they beg their husbands to take on other partners: "It is a remarkably beautiful thing about their marriages that the same jealousy our wives have to keep us from the affection and kindness of other women, theirs have to win this for them."[199] An assertion that is made all the more outrageous by Montaigne's use of biblical precedent:

Montaigne spurned the falsifying effects of a Sebastian Munster or a Francois de Belleforest, the greater the sense of an affiliation and a need, it appeared, to sort through their histories." This perhaps explains the almost "wax museum" quality of Montaigne's cannibals; when one is aware of all the source materials Montaigne is actually drawing from, one gets a better sense of how politically selective his cannibal pastiche actually is. Tom Conley, "Thevet Revisits Guanabara," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 80:4 (2000).

[199] Ibid., 158.

if Sarah, Leah, and Rachel gave handmaids to their husbands, why shouldn't European wives participate in this "matrimonial virtue of the highest order?"

The pleasure that Léry had taken in American violence, is likewise reproduced in Montaigne, but without reference to Machiavellian politics and the torturous nature of cyclical revenge, "their warfare is wholly noble and generous and as excusable and beautiful as this human disease can be; its only basis among them is their rivalry and valor."[200] These warriors go to war completely naked (the detailed descriptions of Tupi wardress provided by Léry goes unmentioned), perhaps to emphasize their bravery: "it is astonishing what valor they show in their combats which never end but in slaughter and bloodshed,"[201]— Montaigne, it seems, although troubled by the civil strife raging all around him, was one step removed from the position of Léry, who had suffered through a siege first hand and who was all too familiar with the horrors of human conflict.

The cannibal rite, slowly and deliberately described in the Histoire, receives less than a page. The actual process of consumption is of surprisingly little interest to Montaigne. In his brief description, a prisoner is struck, roasted, eaten, and various pieces are sent to absent friends. His apology for the behavior is also more philosophical than Léry's. To downplay the act, Monaigne invokes the chief stoics Zeno and Chrysippus, two thinkers who believed that the ingestion of a human corpse is nothing too serious in moments of necessity. The ancestors of the Gauls, besieged by Caesar, had also turned to the practice in order withstand a famine, as Montaigne reminds his reader. The general tone of disinterest with which he treats his subject is perhaps the only remarkable aspect of the whole relation.

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[200] Ibid., 156.
[201] Ibid., 155.

Of course, his cannibals "don't wear breeches," and they will inevitably be corrupted through intercourse with Europe, but otherwise, they are approachable fellows. When a group visited Rouen during the reign of King Charles, Montaigne tells us that he held a conversation with three of "these people." Of whom he asked three things, one of which he quite pathetically admits having forgotten, the other two, however, he remembers. Cannibals, according to Montaigne's relation, would never suffer to obey a child king, and they likewise did not understand why the half of France subjected to poverty did not just rise up and slit the throats or set fire to the houses of the half possessed of all its wealth.[202]

It is dry essay, less one of passion than of feigned passion; rhetorically belligerent by way of an underlying apathy. What one would suspect as the climax of the essay, the conversation with three native Brazilians at Rouen, turns out to be nothing but a middling denouement. One famously ruined by the stupidity of a local translator and Montaigne's notoriously bad memory. In "Des Cannibales," the cannibal speaks, but his words are fumbled and forgotten. It is a telling development, particularly when one considers to what great lengths Jean de Léry had gone to provide the Tupi with a textual voice.

Just two years earlier, the text of the Histoire had included an extensive fictionalized conversation held between a Frenchman and a Tupinamba. Not only is the chapter containing the imagined colloquy the longest in the work, it is likewise the most meticulously concerned with representation. Léry's conversation functions as an interesting piece of ethnographic counterpoint—beginning with "I have come," and progressing turn by turn until the Tupi interlocutor provides the Frenchman with a vocabulary lesson. It is a charged little piece of imaginary dialectic, one that would inspire countless later ethnographers to include similar

[202] Ibid., 159

linguistic explorations in their own text. It is not without meaning that Léry's vocabulary is a list of all the various parts of the body: Ché-avè, My head; Chè-voua, My face; Che-jourou, My mouth; Chè-ram, My teeth; ,Ché-ajouré, My throat; Ché-reguie, My belly. Of course, it would be disingenuous and deceptive to lead the reader to believe that Léry's anatomy is purely a cannibal anatomy. His body vocabulary is complete, containing words both crucial and innocuous: Chè-pouy-asoo, my spine; Ché-pussempé, my toenails; Che-enc gouere, my soul after it has left my body.[203]

For the first time in a widely published European text, the American body had been detailed in its own language. It is a profound moment, one that Montaigne inadvertently silences. In borrowing Léry's moral but jettisoning his framework of inquiry, "Des Canibales" births a powerful new intellectual trope—the Noble Savage—but fails to present a more complex body to the European world. If anything, the move accomplished in the essay is one of reclamation. Montaigne definitively centers his notion of the cannibal by deferring to the authority of the canon: his American inhabits the Renaissance fantasyland of the "Golden Age," not the alien land of Brazil. It is an odd gesture. If Léry succeeds in "taking the knife" to a trope whose edges had become round and worn from persistent handling, Montaigne, through the artifice of his craft, succeeds almost immediately in rendering that trope safe again. The cannibal has been defanged. It is now free to morph—through continual allegorical abuse—into the Noble Savage.

[203] Léry, 188.

Taking stock: The legacy of Jean de Léry

As Hayden White noted some time ago, "the theme of the Noble Savage may be one of the few historical topics about which there is nothing left to say."[204] A statement even more irrefutable today than it was in 1976. It is not the goal of this essay to retrace the dimensions of this well-worn figure, or, even worse, to begin making claims about its origins, but rather to question its historical predominance. As a conceptual icon, the Noble Savage is far too documented too be denied, but one can challenge his canonization. While the theme is prevalent, it is by no means hegemonic. Out of the shifting mythology surrounding the sixteenth-century American body sprung a number of different thematic trajectories. These trajectories will be discussed in the concluding chapter of this thesis, but perhaps, it serves to provide one final assessment of the impact of the Histoire, for while Montaigne certainly hijacked the image of Léry's cannibal, it would be a mistake to sum up the influence of the Histoire according to that one unfortunate thematic appropriation.

Writing in 1975, Michel de Certeau assesses the transition accomplished by Léry thus:

> The savage becomes a senseless speech ravishing Western discourse, but one which, because of that very fact, generates a productive science of meaning and objects that endlessly writes. The locus of the other that this speech represents is hence doubly fabulous: first by virtue of a metaphorical rupture (fari, the act of speech not having a subject that can be named), and then by virtue of an object that can be understood (a fiction that can be translated into the terms of knowledge)…At the very least, Léry's

[204] Hayden White, "The Noble Savage Theme as Fetish" in *First Images of America* ed. Fredi Chiappelli (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976).

> story sketches the science of this fable, which essentially will become ethnography—or the manner of its invention in history.[205]

The science of a fable, or the fable of a science—either way, Jean de Léry instigates a movement that will ultimately provide twentieth-century humanity with its last great Western mythology, that of the eyewitness anthropos: the informant that goes out amongst men to report on the status of Man. A dubious birth to be sure, but one to be examined with scrutiny. As with any origin story, that of anthropology is fractured, obscure, and ultimately untraceable—all characteristics which render its telling all the more necessary. Perhaps what is really accomplished in the Histoire is less a birth than a mutation, a violent modal shift signaling a definitive moment in the evolution of a genre.

Until Léry, the rhetoric of distance had generally proceeded via circulating appeals to canonical authority: "On my journey, just one in a long legacy of other similar journeys, I saw Y just where X said it would be." Until the late Renaissance, measures of cultural difference (at least within travel narratives) were primarily gauged according to the rubric provided by a long series of pre-established text: both ecclesiastical and classical. Léry, however, insists on the I. His is an intensely confessional work repeatedly emphasizing the position of the observer in relation to a world that must be experienced. "One should go and see for oneself," it is not enough to simply know.

The report contained in the Histoire represents the fresh crystallization of a greater Renaissance movement away from the authority of the text and towards the authority of the witness. We need true observers, exclaimed Montaigne in 1580, for learned and dusty cosmographers endlessly recycling the "false tales" of antiquity will no longer do: "I would

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[205] Michel de Certeau, "Ethno-graphy," 237.

have everyone write what he knows, and as much as he knows, not in this place only, but in all other subjects."[206] Two generations later, Descartes would craft an entire system of philosophy, not around the textual edifice supplied by history, but around all the personal experiences touching the life of the ego. If the Histoire presages the birth of ethnography, it is because Léry contributes eloquently to this growing cult of the witness: he is the first to say (in so many words): "Here I am among the others, this is me beside the alien, we are living together."

[206] Montaigne, 152.

Chapter 5

Quixote, Caliban, and the Cannibal Queen

In what sense is reality lost to allegory? How does a symbol—employed repeatedly over a long space of time—slowly etch away the discursive efficacy of the subject who inspired it? Such erasures occur quite frequently, icons replace personalities, and hieroglyphs supplant bodies. The trace, of course, remains (no erasure is a total erasure), but how are we to read the palimpsest? I do not pretend to know, if anything, this essay was provoked by the doubt and anxiety engendered by such speculation. After all, the line dividing history and the mythology of history is difficult to fix, but one can nevertheless observe it as it fluxes in and out of focus in the text of every historic work. If it is a line that is rarely confronted, perhaps it is because historians, as a general rule, tend to be too liberal with their semantics. But it is a line that must be confronted, for to do otherwise is to persist in the comfortable lie that history and its fictions are easily demarcated.

This is not to forward some nihilistic (and, at this point, trite) assertion that "all reality is fiction," but to argue that myth bears heavily upon the process of history. There are periods, even, in which one would be amiss to go off searching for things "as they actually happened," forgetting that the construction of mythology is an integral way in which society commits its experience to memory. What is a myth, perhaps, if not an impressionistic history, one that is vague and obscure but no less valid? Of course, an impressionist rendering tends to reveal more about the attitude of the artist (or the milieu in which the artist operates) than it does about what is depicted in the space of its representation.

So far, this essay has pursued the concept of the myth of an American body, a concept crucially attached to the evolution of a much broader cultural thematics. If a popular image

can be defined as operating throughout the sixteenth century, then it is at the turn of the seventeenth that the image fractures. It is at this point that the American body is ever more gradually appropriated as *ideological* trope, or more specifically, as multiple ideological tropes. The correspondence between actual bodies and the body images functioning in European culture became less a matter of concern, for an extensive history of depictions prevented new depictions from challenging their hold on the "European imagination" (this is not to say that fresh voyager narratives ceased informing popular perceptions, but that dominant images, those produced from Vespucci to de Bry, proved difficult to displace, and thus new images had a tendency to be grafted onto the old).

By the mid 1590s, the "Cannibal Other," had been transformed into allegory. The collective native body, culled from a series of illustrations provided by Thevet, Staden, Léry, and John White, had been quite literally engraved into history by Theodor de Bry. What had once been a provocative and exotic image, became a useful one; myriad in its applications, but far removed from the bodies that actually inspired it. American geography, increasingly personified in female form, became a popular point of political rhetoric. Perhaps more importantly, the cannibal idyll was effectively parsed during this period. At the turn of the century, the positive traits attributed to American bodies by Montaigne were channeled into the emerging idea of the *bonne homme*, the natural innocent, the Noble Savage. While all of the terror and disgust associated with the savagery of New World peoples provided what could be considered the first seeds of some modern general notion of human hierarchy.[207]

[207] As Anthony Pagden suggests, it is José de Acosta who first presents the idea of some kind of cultural gradient. This gradient, however, should not be understood in definitively racial terms. Acosta, seems to have posited a kind of proto-diffusionism which held that native peoples had degenerated due to isolation, a fate that could theoretically befall any group of people. Anthony Pagden, Chapter 7, "A programme for comparative ethnology" *The Fall of Natural Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

Caliban emerges on the English stage some twenty years later, his mongrel body signaling a thematic aporia. He is over-determined and under-developed, his imaginary physical corpus disappears below a series of conflicting descriptions. With every new line, he threatens to mutate; some new epitaph will augment whatever form he has so far mustered. He is fish, ape, reptile, savage, but more than anything, he is monster: "this thing of darkness." He has learned to speak, or rather, he has "learned to curse."[208] As character, Caliban is neither terrifying nor inspired, but somehow pathetically enticing—at least today; historically, we cannot be sure how the character was portrayed the first time he took the stage, but we have a long performance history testifying to his near endless series of metamorphoses.[209]

In the imaginary world of *The Tempest*, Caliban, a conglomeration of so many different outbound mythic bodies, has been tamed. More than that, the island which he stalks—"my island" he tells Prospero, is fixed securely in the Mediterranean. The encounter with difference, for centuries creeping farther and farther from Europe, is suddenly resituated in a familiar locale. It is a retreat perhaps motivated by a greater moment of cultural aphasia, an inability to speak that inspires epic satire—it is a moment that has been ably dissected before.

Mimesis and Quixote: Staging distance

Perhaps if we still believe in the somewhat arbitrary distinction between the Modern and the pre-Modern, it is because Michel Foucault was such an eloquent and impassioned

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[208] See Stephen Greenblatt's "Learning to curse: aspects of linguistic colonialism in the sixteenth century" in *Learning to Curse: essays in early modern culture* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[209] For an in-depth examination of the character's cultural history, see Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). For a specific history of Caliban's multiple transformations on stage, see Chapter 7 "Stage History."

proponent of historical rupture. His major break, of course, occurs at the end of the Renaissance, and his most elegant metaphor is his Quixote, that "long, thin graphism, a letter that has just escaped from the pages of a book."[210] In Cervante's novel, Foucault discovers a working commentary on thought in transition. What matters, at the beginning of the seventeenth-century, "are no longer resemblances but identities and differences."[211] Medieval science—which had been conducted within the text, for the text, and by the text—is suddenly loosed to wander in a startling nominalist natural world, one possessed of a thousand minor distinctions that work like blades upon all previously established analogues. Similitude "is no longer the form of knowledge but rather the occasion of error, the danger to which one exposes oneself when one does not examine the obscure region of confusions."[212] It is a transition that we have already seen foreshadowed by Léry and Montaigne, both of whom desired sharper testimony—not textual deference and recycled signs, but detail and the unique relation of the witness. It is a movement that Foucault detects everywhere within the period:

> …it was also in the nature of things that the knowledge of the sixteenth century should leave behind it the distorted memory of a muddled and disordered body of learning in which all the things in the world could be linked indiscriminately to men's experiences, traditions, or credulities.[213]

Authority, though more reliant on and possessive of the word than ever before, was increasingly skeptical of all the sanctioned texts that had once enshrined its knowledge. "The

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[210] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 46.
[211] Ibid., 50.
[212] Ibdi., 51.
[213] Ibid., 51.

chimeras of similitude loom up on all sides, but they are recognized as chimeras…"[214] If the cynocephali face extinction at the turn of the seventeenth century, it is because the memories of antiquity are no longer mistaken for the memories of the present: a particular chain of transmission has been broken, a channel of knowledge has failed. It is, perhaps, Foucault's most profound historical insight, one that bears heavily on this essay.

While Foucault is perhaps more concerned with the performance of Don Quixote's adventures than the itinerary that directs them, it is of no small significance that he notes that the novel unfolds in the space of a single Iberian province. It is Cervantes' most biting piece of irony, one that censors even his most exuberant satirical predecessor, Rabelais. The French humanist's protagonists, Pantagruel and Panurge, had exuberantly embraced distance. How many islands do they visit on their journeys? What far and distant marvels do they not encounter? Cervantes, however, is sick of travel. His knight errant adventures securely in the familiar geography of Iberia, never even escaping the province of La Mancha. It is a witty and telling indictment of travel literature.

Suddenly, the theme of the outbound mythic body and the hero who journeys to the borders of the known to slay it suffers a reversal. The hero is revealed as delusional and the monsters he battles illusory. In the pages of *Don Quixote*, a great Western fascination is brilliantly dissected. Travel, until then the most functional mode of narrative emplotment, is subjected to mockery and replaced by Time: a narrative mode that would persist until the twentieth century, when Joyce stages another satirical coup by unfolding the plot of *Ulysses* in the space of a single day. Compare again *Don Quixote* to the *Gargantua* series, a work in which characters of fantastic proportions saunter across the globe, all the while discovering

[214] Ibid., 51.

wonders and dispatching all kinds of threatening foreign bodies.[215] For Rabelais, working in the sixteenth century, physical discovery—regardless of all the ways he explodes the lies of the ancient travelers—is still tantamount to narrative progression. Likewise, in Rabelais, the corpus functions as a microcosm of creation, and an entire new world—hidden in the mouth of the giant protagonist—is quite literally contained in the body. Whereas Cervantes, working less than a hundred years later, continually reminds his audience of the fragility of both mental and bodily states. His hero stumbles from adventure to adventure always on the verge of physical collapse—Don Quixote is a ramshackle body at war with his textually polluted imagination.

Despite its comedic tone, *Don Quixote* is ultimately a pessimistic work. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to read the novel historically as a piece of tragedy. Of course today, a tragic reading is almost inevitable, particularly considering the elegiac treatment of the early Modern by those suspicious of the empiricist impulse; such a reading, although ahistoric, is poetic in the sense that it fixes the author himself as antagonist. Keenly aware of the limits of life and reality, Cervantes ends his performance by brutally plucking the strings off his marionette. Don Quixote, a transcendent absurdist hero if he maintains his faith, instead relinquishes his magic in light of damning evidence. According to this modern reading, it is reason which Cervantes cruelly allows to break Quixote's stalwart heart. However, it is unlikely that a seventeenth-century audience would have read the work in the same way. Instead, it is precisely reason which propels Quixote to break from his delusion. This break signals his demise, but like a deathbed conversion, the hero is delivered from his error and thus falls back instep with his own historicity. In light of experience, Quixote judges and

[215] For a discussion of the *Gargantua* series, see Walter Stephens, *Giants in Those Days: Folklore, Ancient History, and Nationalism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

ultimately comes down on the side of rationality—his values in the end resembling less those of Orlando Furioso and more those of Francis Bacon.

The death of Don Quixote certainly does not spell the end of the voyager or the hero in Western literature, but it forces a reimagining in which travel becomes less a matter of heroic adventure or religious awakening and more a matter of national, economic, or scientific obligation—themes which would later be explored across centuries by Diderot, Dafoe, Verne, and Kipling. But it is this early seventeenth century movement which reverses a dominant thematic trend. It is no accident that the greatest literary work of adventure supplied during the seventeenth century takes place in a single province in the heart of Iberia and not out amongst the unruly jungles of the Americas. Never before in the history of the world did a character have so much geographic space to roam, and yet Cervantes, having lost his faith in distance, envelopes his protagonist in the local.

Describing flux: Caliban as an expression of cultural aphasia

If *Don Quixote* marks a rupture, then *The Tempest* works as caesura, a pause before the beginning of "new relations." The play, generally regarded as Shakespeare's *ultima poesia*, is even bleaker than Cervantes' novel: for the Books are not satirized, they are simply retired. Adopting the stance of "Des Canibales," the play takes Montaigne's skepticism and swings it into a beautiful expression of total ontic doubt. The material world itself—that vast and mysterious geography so jealously desired by the voyagers—is but a passing fancy: "such stuff as dreams," etcetera, etcetera. It is no doubt a discovery text, a work that would have been impossible without the *Naufragium, Utopia*, Virginia, *The Discoverie of Guiana,* and the increasing number of voyager narratives being published in England from the 1590s

onward.[216] But how does the play figure the thematic Other? How does the work prematurely signal the coming rupture identified by Cervantes?

In *Don Quixote,* the myth of the distant body has been dispelled, or more appropriately, it has been decoded. Thus, the mythology from which travel narrative pulled its figures has been deciphered and revealed as nothing but the hysterical inflation of the everyday. Foucault again:

> Each exploit must be a proof: it consists, not in a real triumph—which is why victory is not really important—but in an attempt to transform reality into a sign. Into a sign that the signs of language really are in conformity with things themselves. *Don Quixote reads the world in order to prove his books*.[217]

The italics are my own and in place to emphasize the relevance here of the thematic reversal staged by Cervantes. Don Quixote is the "disordered player of the Same and the Other."[218] He is the satiric body that signals the Baroque's disenchantment with all the figures of alterity. If his giants are windmills, it is because they can no longer be giants. An unhelpful tautology to be sure, but one that helps us understand the Other as if functions in *The Tempest.*

One cannot ask *who* the character Caliban is, because no consensus has yet been reached to inform us *what* he is. Caliban is a scrap-rigged character, assembled out of the recently discarded parts of broken down mythologies. In the text he is described as puppy-headed, finned, scaled, tortoise-like—his motley physical corpus seems to reflect all those

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[216] For textual sources pertaining to the play, one should consult Bullough's exhaustive *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* vol. 8 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975). See also, Stephen Orgel's excellent "Shakespeare and the Cannibals" in *Cannibals, Witches, and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance*, selected papers from the English institute, 1985 ed. Marjorie Garber, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987): 40-66.
[217] Foucault, 47.
[218] Ibid., 49.

rare *deformités Americques* described by Thevet. The character almost might be thought of as the fictional embodiment of a broader cultural aphasia, Europe's inability to precisely describe what it now sees in the distance: cannibals? Indians? monsters? Savages? degenerates? But whatever he might be, he is no longer a prodigy in any historical sense; nothing to be wondered at, nothing to be analyzed, perhaps not even something to be cataloged.

"This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine," Prospero announces in the final act of the play. It would be too easy to assert that Caliban is the id to Prospero's super ego: that the alien Monster has been the European Father all along, lusting after his daughter, arranging her marriage while at the same time plotting rape, massacre, and ruin. No, a schizoid Freudian interpretation of the play is an ahistorical one, as is a postcolonial reading. "This thing of darkness," should not be misconstrued as shades of the "White Man's Burden." Prospero has no intention of transporting Caliban back to Europe, nor does he have future designs on his person or his island. Caliban will remain firmly stationed in Elsewhere: left to recount his injuries and wonder if he ever had any other choice but "to sue for peace."

"How many goodly creatures:" A note towards the myth of the European body

If *The Tempest* is ambivalent towards the nature of distant bodies, it is enraptured by those closest to home. Like Cervantes, Shakespeare too plays with the notion of place in order to stage a thematic reversal. All the monsters and prodigies and other mythic figures patrolling the edge of civilization—so obsessed over just a generation earlier— are abandoned by Shakespeare in favor of more familiar miracles. As infant exile, Miranda fulfills two separate positions within the text of the play. She is simultaneously virginal European daughter and dumb-struck native of a "Newfoundland." She is both foreign and

domestic: certainly an object to be jealously guarded, instructed, and bartered with, but she is also a kind of oracle with the ability to articulate the sense of awe that all previous non-European bodies have only been able to mime at. When she first encounters her soon-to-be husband Ferdinand, she exclaims, "A thing divine; for nothing natural I ever saw so noble." At the same time, Ferdinand is suddenly able to explicitly express European desire for the Other, for the Other is likewise the Same. The golden age of Montaigne is undone in a motion, and will be shortly mocked by Shakespeare by way of the naïve utopian homily delivered by Gonzalo:

> I' th' commonwealth I would by contraries
> Execute all things; for no kind of traffic
> Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
> Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
> And use of service, none; contract, succession,
> Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
> No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
> No occupation; all men idle, all;
> And women too, but innocent and pure;
> No sovereignty…
> All things in common nature should produce
> Without sweat or endeavor. Treason, felony,
> Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine
> Would I not have; but nature should bring forth,
> Of it own kind, all foison, all abundance,

To feed my innocent people…

I would with such perfection govern, sir,

T'excel the golden age.

(2.1.145-154…157-162…165-166)[219]

"Thou dos talk nothing to me," Alonso, King of Naples replies. Montaigne, it seems, is too optimistic to be treated seriously. The Golden age he had been dreaming after is envisioned by Shakespeare as possible only within the confines of art, and then only with the help of artifice and illusion. If reality must be confronted, it will be so with the help of new mythologies. In the fifth act, Miranda, stunned at the appearance of so many new European bodies, provides her famous exclamation:

O, wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world

That has such people in't!

(5.1.182-183)[220]

After more than a century of reports from the Americas, after so many depictions of magnificent bodies, the sole body that is presented as wondrous in this turn of the seventeenth-century masterwork is the body of the Same. As it turns out, the brave new world is not the one obscured by a thousand miles of ocean, but the one that has always been the most immediate. It is an uncanny inversion, one that suggests that a previous literary mythology had been exhausted. The American body, which has been given final and ironic

[219] I quote here from Stephen Orgel's critical edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).
[220] Ibid.

voice in the figure of Miranda, has nothing left to do but announce the invention of the European.

Conclusion

Literary history has always been something of a difficult proposition. For certainly within such histories there is the tendency to conflate one's observations, to forget oneself in the fictions under analysis and to assert historical *experience* in way of historical *representation***.** No doubt, it is easy to get swept up in aesthetics, sharpening focus on only those most provocative of sources in the canon. If literary history often gives historians pause, it is for good reason; after all, the lines between myth and reality, depiction and process, truth and fantasy—though generally arbitrary in distinction—are nevertheless the lines that demarcate the space our discipline thus providing the functional borders dividing history from comparative literature. Regardless of one's position concerning the now exhausted history as literature vs. history as social science debate, to assert that there is no difference between historical analysis and literary analysis would be, quite ironically, something of a pedantic enterprise, an attempt to impose a highly rigid set of linguistically split-hair definitions with a total disregard for practice, methodology, and pragmatic semantics. In other words, if history is history and literary analysis is literary analysis, it is because those who practice in both fields have traditionally established a functional and meaningful boundary.

At the same time, there is simply no way to exclude literary documents from the practical archive of historical sources, for they most definitely tell us something about the past. Over the course of five chapters, this thesis has attempted to engage a set of familiar literary sources that have not yet been thoroughly examined in any comparative manner. In

presenting a synthetic examination, a genealogy of images has been traced. Admittedly, the line of descent has been, at least at times, a little unwieldy, but that does not diminish the fact that there is something to be gained by contextualizing sixteenth-century European discovery in a more extensive tradition of travel narrative. In the particular case of a collection of highly influential French sources it is possible to discern and effectively define salient themes and tropes borrowed from a much older literature. In doing so, one provides greater continuity to an intellectual history that has been much discussed but rather poorly defined.

In the case of Dominican cosmographer Andre Thevet, for example, one discovers not only a French Catholic interpretation of the colonial project at Guanabara, but also a collection of literary figurations culled from popular voyager narratives such as Marco Polo's *Divisament* and the collective work *Mandeville's Travels*. As such, his native cannibals are more than just colonial propaganda, they are stock figures in a much older European literary tradition. This is not to dismiss the political utility of such representations, but to suggest that they also possess an aesthetic component—an adherence to convention and popular expectations—that has so far gone relatively unexplored.

If thematic continuity is not properly established, if literary conventions are simply taken for granted—perceived as some kind of extra-historical facet of early Age of Discovery documents—then one finds oneself in danger of "conflating one's cannibals"—naively asserting that all European depictions of foreign bodies are inherently political and serve but one function, namely the proliferation of the colonial project. Accordingly, documents of dynamic intellectual historical importance such as Jean de Léry's *Histoire de un voyage* are

clumsily grouped together with sources of wildly differing political and aesthetic goals.[221] However, when a deeper reading of these sources is presented, it becomes obvious that sixteenth century images of American bodies are not one dimensional or static but in a constant process of negotiation.

Of course, such a statement does not explain the complex politics of representation characteristic of European colony, but it can help better illustrate the development of a intellectual tradition that made ready use of American tropes and figures. It would be easy, for instance, to oversimplify and therefore dehistoricize the character Caliban, to see him as a prime literary expression of an essential European prejudice against foreign bodies, when his aesthetic heritage is actually far more complicated and ambivalent. Such an observation lends support to the argument in favor of literary history as avenue of inquiry that can better nuance and inform our understanding of cultural encounter.

This study cannot pretend to explain the impetus behind all sixteenth-century American bodies. Like all historic depictions of cultural difference, a wide range of motives underpin the corpus of images that historians must confront in order to better understand the complex epistemology that developed around the question of the Americas. Although a minor colonial force in Brazil and the Caribbean, the brief French incursion into Latin America provoked some remarkably sophisticated intellectual discussions back in Europe. It is the position of this thesis that these French discussions of the American body, far from representing an anomalous or isolated discursive event, represent a far more intricate and connected engagement with alterity. Given time, greater analysis will most likely reveal a

[221] This has been the case in works ranging from historian Patricia Seed's recent *American Pimiento* to literary critic and Renaissance scholar Stephen Greenblatt's *Marvelous Possessions*. While both works present original ways of conceptualizing European colony, neither work can be said to engage Jean de Léry's *Histoire* or the French colonial project at Guanabara with appropriate historical nuance.

narrative of sixteenth-century exploration and encounter that is productively comparative yet historically disaggregated; hopefully, this study contributes to the furthering of such a process.

Epilogue: Allegories of desire and violence

Sometime in the 1590s, John Donne penned what stands to this day as his most recognizable contribution to English poetry, his nineteenth elegy. It is a poem endlessly contested, for the limits of its allegory are difficult to define. It is a youthful and defiant voice with which the poet addresses a mistress in possession of a meta-anatomy, and it is the revelation of this anatomy that Donne is after,

> Full nakedness! All joys are due to thee,
> As souls unbodied, bodies unclothed must be
> To taste whole joys.[222]

The roving hands of the narrator are, as everyone knows, in search of new topography to explore: "Oh my America! my new-found-land." It is a strange figuration, one that Donne could have stolen from any number of places.

In 1582, the Calvinist poet Stephen Parmenius, a Hungarian expatriate and friend of Richard Hakluyt, produced a poem in praise of Sir Gilbert Humphrey. In careful dactylic hexameter, the poet imagines America as a young woman violated by the gold lust of frenzied Spaniards. She beseeches the "noble youths" of England to come to her aid: "grasp my shore tightly with your serviceable right hand."[223] A similar trope appears in George Chapman's *De Guiana, Carmen Epicum* a poem prefacing Sir Walter Raleigh's *The*

[222] I quote from the Norton critical edition (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007) 67.
[223] I quote R.V. Young's translation as it appears in "'O My America, My New-Found-Land': Pornography and Imperial Politics in Donne's 'Elegies,'" *South Central Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2, John Donne (Summer, 1987), 35-48.

Discoverie of Guiana, an even odder work in which England's most intrepid young men are encouraged to "place their glad feet on smooth Guiana's breast."[224] While it is impossible to know if Donne was familiar with either of these poems, all three works are indicative of a general mood concerning the Americas. This mood need not be described as imperialistic; indeed, Donne himself was generally adverse to the notion of English colony. He writes in "The Good Marrow," for example,

> Let sea-discoveres to new worlds have gone,
> Let maps to others, worlds on worlds have shown,
> Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.[225]

But still, his America! (the exclamation point is essential) suggests much about the direction of New World tropology.

Here the American body is caught up in an early seventeenth-century metaphysics, her powers (for there is no doubt now about this body's gender) are increasingly diminished. By the birth of the Enlightenment she will be completely vitiated; but for a brief window of time beginning in the 1580s and ending roughly before the first performance of *The Tempest*, her metaphor will be more violent—the image of America as Cannibal Queen will take hold. Illustrations, engravings, and paintings will be produced by Etienne Delaune, Philippe Galle, Dirk Barendsz, Crispijn de Passe, and Maarten de Vos, they will depict ample and unclad bodies, covered with feathers and bits of jewelry, almost all carry weapons: spears, bows, clubs, and axes; some ride upon the backs of giant armadillos, others carry severed heads.

Here, I must insert one paragraph too many, for to do otherwise would be to suggest some kind of thematic elegy. This is not my purpose: an image should not be mourned.

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[224] Ibid., 43.
[225] Donne, 1.

While the passing of the Cannibal Queen is an event of historic consequence—another interesting mutation in the history of a broader mythic body—it is a passing that deserves no eulogy, for to provide it with one would be to sympathize with a fiction. The urge, however—the desire to reanimate historic subjects in the collective guise of historic symbol—should be noted here; if anything, simply to mark off a site for further investigation.

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