Cannibalism and the New Man of Latin America in the 15th- and 16th-Century European Imagination

Michael Palencia-Roth

University of Illinois, Urbana

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr

Recommended Citation

Palencia-Roth, Michael (1985) "Cannibalism and the New Man of Latin America in the 15th- and 16th-Century European Imagination," Comparative Civilizations Review: Vol. 12 : No. 12 , Article 3. Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol12/iss12/3
CANNIBALISM AND THE NEW MAN OF LATIN AMERICA IN THE 15TH- AND 16TH-CENTURY EUROPEAN IMAGINATION

MICHAEL PALENCA-ROTH

Defined literally, cannibalism is the eating of one human being by another. In some instances only a specific part of the body is eaten; in others, only the blood is drunk. Although cannibalism has been practiced in all parts of the world, it is generally associated with "primitive peoples." In fact, as Eli Sagan correctly points out (Cannibalism, 1-2), the Aztecs were the only "civilized" people who practiced it, and they did so only to a limited degree. Columbus was the first European to use the New World word, "canibal"; before Columbus, in fact, the term for "man-eater" was "anthropofagus." "Canibal" appears in several different forms in the diary of Columbus's first voyage in 1492: for instance, as "canibales" on the 23rd of November 1492; as "caniba" and "canima" on the 26th of November 1492; as "caribes" on the 26th of December 1492. From Spanish, the word passed into other European languages. In English it became "cannibal" with two "n's" but Shakespeare used the Spanish spelling when he rearranged its letters into the anagram "Caliban," the name of the savage slave of Prospero in The Tempest.

The present essay, however, is not about cultural linguistics or even about the anthropological phenomenon of cannibalism itself, concerning which theories and descriptions abound. For our purposes, it is important only that cannibalism probably did exist in the Americas, despite the efforts of some apologists to convince us otherwise, and that both the fact and the idea of cannibalism contributed to the image of the New Man that European developed concerning the Americas in the 15th and 16th centuries. Although in subsequent essays I intend to explore what I call "the sublimated fortunes of cannibalism as a historical metaphor" in 18th, 19th, and 20th-century European and Latin American thought, here my purpose is more modest: to document and analyze the discovery, creation and classification of the cannibal as the New Man in Latin

Published by BYU ScholarsArchive, 1985
America and, in less detail, to do the same for the role that he plays in the formation of European civilizational attitudes toward the New World.

The story of the European notions of the New Man in the New World—and the cannibal in particular—is complex for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that the New Man seemed in one sense to be genuinely "new" to the Europeans. He was neither African nor Asiatic nor Indian, and Europeans did not know for a long time what to make of him. Their views of the New Man contain ambivalence, uncertainty, and extremism: at times the New Man is the New Adam, at others, he is sub-human; at times he is the incarnation of the free man, at others, he is the natural slave; at times he is highly civilized, at others, there is no greater barbarian on earth. And the New World, the land itself, was considered with similar extremism: now as a paradise on earth, a hospitable land of gentle breezes and fertile soil; now as a forbidding territory of impenetrable jungles and unscalable mountains, a living hell.

Why focus in this essay on European notions concerning the New Man, on the cannibal in particular, rather than on the Aztec, on the Inca, or on the Indian in general? First, in the struggle to define and to make sense of the New Man and the New World the cannibal played a major role in the European imagination. Here was something concrete to think about, to write about, to portray. Second, the cannibal represents the New Man at the point of greatest difference from the European: he is the New Man as the extreme Other. Because of the cannibal's clearly conceivable otherness, European reactions to him, both favorable and unfavorable, reveal deeply rooted civilizational and moral values. Statements concerning cannibalism are often civilizational statements. Third, the history of the incorporation of the cannibal into the European moral framework helps to explain how and why certain attitudes came to exist regarding the Americas, and especially Latin America—attitudes which, it is important to realize, sometimes exist even today. I shall analyze several aspects of that history by focusing principally on the observations of Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci and Michel de Montaigne in 15th and 16th century European letters, and on the work of Hans Staden, André Thevet and Theodor de Bry in 16th-century European iconography.

II

When Columbus landed on the shores of what is now acknowledged to be Watlings Island, he discovered a man unlike any other man in any known civilization. So startling was this "Other" that Columbus natu-
rally could describe him only by relating him to existing European geographical conceptions of the world and to the mythical and religious foundations of European thought. This is why the native American became an “Indian,” related—though by name only—to those other Indians somewhere on the outskirts of the Kingdom of the Great Khan in China. This is why, also, he was seen as a new Adam: naked, simple, natural, and untouched by original sin. But as Columbus sailed through the Caribbean, landing on island after island, a different image of “the Other” began to intrude forcibly into his consciousness: the New Man not as a new Adam but as a devourer of human flesh.

The subject of cannibalism enters Columbus’s diaries for the first time on November 4th, more than three weeks after the discovery of land. In speaking to the natives, Columbus hears—writes Bartolome de Las Casas in the only existing paraphrase of Columbus’s actual words (the original diary has been lost)—that “lexos de allí avía hombres de un ojo y otros con hocícios de perros que comían los hombres” (“far from there lived one-eyed men, as well as dog-headed men who ate human beings”—Colón, Textos, 51). Here cannibalism occupies the same category in Columbus’s mind that other, largely medieval myths do: here the cannibal, supposedly a dog-headed man, is definitely other than the ordinary European and is only marginally human. In the next description, dated November 23rd, the cannibal, no longer associated with the dog-headed man, is still associated with the one-eyed man simply by being placed adjacent to him in the sentence. In this description, also, Columbus begins to believe in the existence of New World cannibalism:

[The natives tell Columbus that on Bohio, an island to the east of his present location, there were] gente que tenía un ojo en la frente, y otros que se llamavan canibales, a quien mostravan tener gran miedo; y desque vieron que lleva este camino, diz que no podían hablar, porque los comían y que son gente muy armada. El Almirante dize que bien cree que avía algo d’ello, mas que, pues eran armados, serían gente de razón, y creía que avían captivado algunos y que, porque no bolvían a sus tierras, dirían que los comían (Textos, 62).

[There were] people who had one eye in the middle of their forehead, and others who were called cannibals, whom they appeared to fear greatly. And since [the natives] saw that Columbus was headed in that direction, they would not speak because [the cannibals] would eat them, and they were a fiercely armed people. The Admiral says that he believes that there was something to all this, and that because [the cannibals] were armed that they must be rational beings, and he believed that [the cannibals] had captured some of the natives, and that because they did not return to their lands it was said that they were eaten.

Although a phrase like “serían gente de razón” (they must be rational beings—or reasonable people) suggests that Columbus is on his way
toward accepting the cannibal as part of the human species, the news of his existence is still difficult to believe, and Columbus wavers between skepticism and credulity on the subject. On November 26th, in the words of Las Casas, the Admiral “thought they were lying” when the natives mentioned cannibals (“creía el Almirante que mentían” —Textos, 65).

On December 17th, however (though here the text is problematic), on being shown some men with scars whose healed wounds supposedly were caused by cannibals, Columbus “believed it” (“lo creyó” —Textos, 84). Although the only evidence of brutality on that first voyage—and in itself no proof of cannibalism—is the head of a man in a basket hung on the post of a house (November 29th), by the end of the journey Columbus accepts the cannibals’ existence as a fact. Moreover, he feels that he must say something about the scandal of the Indians (“deve dezir del escándalo de los indios” —Textos, 117): cannibalism. However, since the cannibal is no longer spoken of as a dog-headed man, “the Other” has indirectly lost his monstrosity and thus a significant index of his otherness. By the time Columbus writes his famous letter to Luis de Santangel (15 February 1493), which was translated into Latin and circulated throughout Europe, cannibals “are no more malformed than the other” Indians he encountered (“no son más disformes que los otros” indios—Textos, 145). It is notable that Columbus should have chosen negative language here, for in most of his other descriptions of Indians he had written positively of their strength and the beauty of their physique, of their prowess and good health, even of their “innocence” in all things civilized. Such negative terminology shows, perhaps, how disturbed Columbus continues to be about cannibals and cannibalism.

All things considered, Columbus’s response to the startling news of cannibalism in the Indies is relatively mild. On the surface at least other writers are more disturbed. For instance, in Historia general de las Indias, a horrified López de Gómara confesses to great shame that the ears of the Spanish kings were subjected to the news that

allá, en aquellas islas y tierras nuevas, se comían unos hombres a otros, y que todos eran idolatras; y prometieron [los reyes católicos], si Dios les daba vida, de quitar aquella abominable inhumanidad, y desarraigar la idolatria en todas las tierras de India que a su mano viniesen. (I, 36)

there, on those islands and new lands some men ate other men, and that all of them were idolatrous; and [the Catholic kings] promised, if God should grant them life, to get rid of that abominable inhumanity and to uproot idolatry from all the lands of India which might come under their power.

One of the most shocked “contemporary” accounts I have read is by Petrus Martyr de Angleria, an Italian and an official chronicler of the
Council of Indies in Sevilla, Spain. Peter Martyr received all the reports of the New World and personally interviewed many of the participants. The first "Decade" of his major work, *De orbe novo*, was published in 1511 and contributed to the image that the Europeans were constructing of the New World. In describing the people whom the explorers had learned about on that first voyage, Peter Martyr calls the cannibals "monsters" and "savages" and goes into sensationalistic detail concerning certain cannibalistic practices:

Quos pueros capiunt ut nos pullos gallinaceos, aut porcos quos ad obsonia volumus pinguiores et teneriores educare, castrant, grandiores et pingues effectos comedunt, aetate autem iam matura cum ad eorum manus perveniunt, peremptos partiuntur, intestina et extremas membrorum partes recentes epulatur, membra sale condita, ut nos pernas suillas in tempore servant. Mulieres comedere apud eos nephas est et obscenum. (Martyr. *Opera*, 40-41)

Those boys whom [the cannibals] capture they castrate, just as we do chickens or pigs we wish to raise fatter and more tender for food; when the boys have grown larger and fatter, [the cannibals] eat them; but those who are already of a mature age when they fall into their hands they kill and cut up. They feast upon the intestines and extremities fresh, but the other members they salt, as we do with pork hams, and save for another time. To eat women is for [cannibals] forbidden and indecent.

The exact source of Peter Martyr's observations is difficult to determine; it was certainly not Columbus. Except for the word "nephas" (or *nefas*, which means "contrary to divine command; an impious deed; a sin"), Martyr does not show, here or elsewhere, much understanding for the religious or cultural significance of cannibalism.

III

Peter Martyr left Amerigo Vespucci completely out of his history of the New World; there is no evidence in it that he even read the latinized *Mundus Novus* (1503) which, along with the Italian *Lettera* of 1504, was to make Vespucci both famous and infamous. Whether Vespucci was a great charlatan or not (in *Historia de las Indias*, Las Casas certainly thought he was), whether he actually made the 1497 voyage or not (which would have placed him on the mainland before Columbus), is not our concern. It is perhaps more to the point that the so-called Bartolozzi letter of 1502 (named after the scholar who discovered it in 1789) sets down Vespucci's experiences with cannibals during his first Brazilian voyage (see Morison, *Southern Voyages*, 284). The descriptions in this and other letters earn Vespucci the right of being considered one of the first ethnographers of Latin America. In the words of Samuel Eliot Morison,
the Bartolozzi letter contains "the earliest and best description we have of the Guarani" (Southern Voyages, 284).

Statements in the Bartolozzi letter show an anthropological imagination and intent at work quite different from the mind and intentions Columbus: "Molto travagliai," Vespucci writes of his stay with the cannibals, "ad intendere loro vita, e costumi, perchè 27 di mangiai, e dormii fra loro" ("I worked very hard to understand their lives and customs, because for 27 days I ate and slept among them"—El nuevo mundo, 146). We will return to the details of those 27 days in a moment. Before that, however, let us briefly cite Vespucci's earliest description of the New Man (in a letter dated 18 July 1500). It is perhaps fortuitous that these new people were cannibals:

Erano di una generazione, che si dicono Camballi, che quasi la maggior parte di questa generazione, o tutti vivono di carne umana, e questo lo tenga per certo Vostra Magnificenza. Non si mangiano infra loro, ma navigano in certi navili, che tengono, e vanno a traer preda delle Isole, o terre commarcane d'una generazione inimici loro, e d'altra generazione, che non son loro. Non mangiano femmina nessuna, salvo que le tengono come per istrane, e di questo fummo certi in molte parti, dove trovamo tal gente, si perchè e' ci accadde molte volte veder l'ossa, e capi d'alcuni, che si avevano mangiati, e loro non lo negano; quanto più che ce lo dicevano i lor nemici, che di continuo stanno in timor di essi. Sono gente di gentil disposizione, e di bella statura: vanno disnudi del tutto.

They were of a clan called cannibals, and almost the greater part of this clan, or all of them, live on human flesh, and you may be certain of this, Your Magnificence. They don't eat each other, but they navigate in certain vessels which they have, which are called canoes, and they go to bring booty from islands or nearby lands belonging to an enemy tribe of theirs, and to another tribe which is not theirs. They don't eat women, except that they keep them as "strangers," and about this we were certain in many parts, where we found these people, because many times we saw the bones and the heads of some who had been eaten, and [the cannibals] do not deny it; furthermore, their enemies say this about them and are constantly frightened of them. They are people of a pleasant disposition and of a good height; they go about totally nude.

First of all one notices that, in comparison with Columbus's descriptions, this one has more detail, as would only be natural with an eyewitness account, which Vespucci's purports to be. Second, Vespucci here does not pass judgment on cannibalism per se. He does not use negative adverbs or adjectives, and nowhere does he refer to cannibals as "monsters." They are, rather, "gente" or "generazione."

Vespucci is not wholly detached, however, and the censure implied in the phrase "questo lo tenga per certo Vostra Magnificenza" surfaces
explicitly in the Bartolozzi letter of 1502, which contains Vespucci’s longest ethnographic description of cannibalistic society. Echoing Aristotle, he begins his description by stating that his subject will be “gli Animali ragionali” (*El nuevo mundo*, 146), whom he spent 27 days observing. The description itself balances praiseworthy and censurable details. The society is first depicted with a series of negations common to most writings about Edens, Utopias, or Arcadias.\(^9\) The cannibals have no law, no king to obey (“ognuno è signore di se”—each is master of himself), no boundaries between kingdoms or provinces, no faith, no knowledge of the immortality of the soul, no greed; in sum, they live wholly according to nature (“vivono secondo natura”—146). Here the New Man is the Other in the positive sense: the unattainable ideal, somehow almost as remote from 16th-century man as any savage might be. In writing about the New Man in this way Vespucci is responding to a common European desire, experienced also by Columbus, to see the New Man as the New Adam and the New World as an Eden.\(^{10}\) For instance, during his third voyage Columbus believed himself to be at the entrance to the earthly paradise. And Vespucci himself comments several times that nature in the New World is of such beauty and the climate so mild that they all thought they were in the earthly paradise (“che pensammo essere nel Paradiso terrestre”—*El nuevo mundo*, 100; see also 145, 187).

What in Columbus is a statement of faith is in Vespucci, however, a rhetorical flourish; for this is not the land of Adam and Eve but the land of cannibals, and Vespucci is very much aware of that fact. The language of censure concerning the New Man begins to appear when Vespucci describes how the cannibals cut holes in their lips and cheeks, placing bones, stones and other objects in them in order to appear more ferocious. Vespucci comments that, finally, it was a brutal practice (“infine è brutal cosa”—148). When he describes the cannibals themselves, they are now considered to be a bellicose people, and very cruel among themselves (“gente bellica, e infra loro molto crudeli”—148). In warfare, their prisoners are kept as slaves, and their slain enemies are cut in pieces and eaten. And sometimes, when a certain diabolical fury falls on them (“quando vien loro una furia diabolica”—150), they will kill a mother and her children in public ceremony and eat them. They do the same with their slaves, and with the children born of them. And this is certain, Vespucci says, because in the cannibals’ houses he and his men found much human flesh, which was being cured by smoke. The Europeans bought and thus saved ten children from the sacrificial fate that awaited
them. Vespucci’s play on words is here untranslatable: he saved them from “il sacrifizio [the sacrifice], ma per meglio dire il malefizio [the maleficence]”—150. Although Vespucci strongly criticized the cannibals to their faces (“riprendemmo loro molto”—150), he reports that he does not know if they mended their ways.

In this Bartolozzi letter of 1502 there is greater knowledge of cannibal society than there was in the letter of 1500. There is also more censure, more moral outrage. After such criticism it is surprising to see Vespucci end his long ethnographic description by returning to the idyllic mode. The land, he states, is pleasant and healthful, and the climate temperate. Not one of his men11 died during the ten months that they were among the cannibals, and very few of them fell ill. The cannibals themselves are never sick and do not succumb to plagues or to the corruptions of the air (“corruzioni d’aria”—152). They either die of natural causes or are killed. In short, Vespucci writes, with a touch of humor rare in the literature of exploration in the 16th century, doctors would have a difficult time of it in the New World.

In all of Vespucci’s writings there is respect for the cannibal as a rational human being, as a man who can be argued with and whose behavior can be criticized to his face. Cannibalism may be as reprehensible to Vespucci as it was to Columbus; but the cannibal himself is more human and more understandable. Despite continuing to lose his otherness in this way, however, the New Man is still exotic, still heathen, and, on the European scale of civilizational values, still very much beneath the European.

IV

Montaigne tries to change these European attitudes in his frequent cross-cultural comparisons. Of the writers considered here, Montaigne is the first “civilizationist.” He treats the New World in passing more than one hundred times (see Chinard, 193) and focusses on it especially in two essays, “Des Cannibales” (1580) and “Des Coches” (1588). In the first of these he adopts a characteristically sanguine and detached pose. In the second his mood has changed, for reasons which will become evident subsequently.

In order to attack European ethnocentrism, Montaigne reverses the customary moral, racial and cultural hierarchy of European/White/Civilized over New World/Indian/Primitive. “Des Cannibales” turns on a number of value-laden antinomies which Montaigne redefines with his
usual originality: barbarism vs. civilization; wild vs. tame; natural vs. artificial; purity vs. corruption; cannibalism vs. torture. All of these antinomies hinge on the contrast between the New and the Old World. According to Montaigne, whichever half of the antinomy is more highly valued depends on the position of the observer, who esteems whatever reflects well on himself and on his own culture. Such an insight is of course a truism, but Montaigne is aware of it to an extent unprecedented in the history of the exploration of the New World.

Montaigne begins the substantive portion of his comments in “Des Cannibales” by stripping the civilized European of that feeling of cultural superiority which is based on ethnocentrism:

Je trouve [. . . ] qu’il n’y a rien de barbare et de sauvage en [le Nouveau Monde . . . ] sinon que chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n’est pas de son usage; [c’est seulement dans notre pays qu’on trouve toujours] la parfaicte religion, la parfaicte police, perfect et accomplly usage de toutes choses. Il sont sauvages, de mesme que nous appellons sauvages les fruicts que nature, de soy et de son progres ordinaire a produicts: là où, à la verite, ce sont ceux que nous avons alterez par nostre artifice et detournez de l’ordre commun, que nous devrions appeller plutost sauvages. En ceus là sont vives et vigoureuses les vrayes, et plus utiles et naturelles vertus et proprietez, lesquelles nous avons abastardies en ceux-cy, et les avons seulement accommodées au plaisir de nostre goust corrompu (242-43).

I think [. . . ] that there is nothing barbaric or uncivilized in[the New World . . . ] except that everyone calls “barbarism” whatever he is not accustomed to. [. . . In our country alone is there always] the perfect religion, the perfect political system, the perfect and achieved usage in all things. They are wild men, just as we call those fruits wild which Nature has produced unaided and in her usual course; whereas, in truth, it is those that we have altered by our skill and removed from the common kind which we ought rather to call wild. In the former the real and most useful and natural virtues are alive and vigorous—we have vitiated them in the latter, adapting them to the gratification of our corrupt taste (275-76).

The dominant term in this passage and in Montaigne’s essay as a whole is “nature,” around which all his other values are arranged.12 Anything associated with nature is “good”; anything which detracts from it is “bad.” All too frequently the so-called civilized man seeks to improve nature, but nature is the standard and cannot be improved upon. Attempts to alter nature are thus misguided, and any criticism of any natural state of affairs is misplaced. In addition, since nature is “alive” and “vigorou,” the closer a man is to it the more alive and vigorous he is—and the less corrupt. Since the wild man (le sauvage) is closer to nature than is the civilized European, anything associated with the natural man is going to
be better than anything associated with the civilized one. (Civilization, for Montaigne, is not natural.) Simplicity and uncorrupted purity belong to the savage, not to the European, as the subsequent passage makes clear:

Ces nations [du Nouveau Monde] me semblent donq ansi barbares, pour avoir receu fort peu de façon de l'esprit human, et estre encore fort voisines de leur naïveté originelle. Les loix naturelles leur commandent encore, port peu abastardies par les nostres (243-44).

These nations [of the New World] seem to me, then, wild in this sense, that they have received in very slight degree the external forms of human intelligence and are still very near to their primitive simplicity. The laws of nature still govern them, very little corrupted by ours (276).

Montaigne's final step in this pattern of thought is the following: cannibalism, since it is associated with the wild, natural, primitive, simple, alive, vigorous and uncorrupted man of the New World, cannot be evil. He does not go as far as to insist that canibalism is inherently good, but he does consider cannibalism to be morally superior to European practices of waging war. After describing the cannibals' war practices and how they kill, roast and eat their prisoners, Montaigne states that although it seems to him appropriate to be horrified by these practices, it is wrong to be so and at the same time blind to the even more horrible practices of the Europeans, in particular of the Portuguese. These “civilized” Europeans torture a man by putting him on the rack and roasting him alive, then feeding him to dogs and swine. Cannibals are at least kinder in that they wait until a man is dead before roasting and eating him. Montaigne ends this specific comparison thus:

Nous les pouvons donq bien appeller barbares, eu esgard aux regles de la raison, mais non pas eu esgard a nous, qui les surpassons en toute sorte de barbarie (248).

We can, then, rightly call them barbarians with respect to the rule of reason, but not with respect to ourselves, who surpass them in every sort of barbarism (282).

In sum, Montaigne suggests, both here and later in the essay, it is the civilized man and not the cannibal who is the true barbarian. If we understand the barbarism in our midst, we are much less apt to use the term to label any unfamiliar customs or persons. By writing in this way Montaigne is deconstructing the traditional understanding and use of the term. To the Greeks and the Romans the term “barbarian” designated a foreigner, someone who, being neither Greek nor Roman, was uncivilized; and barbaros, in fact, meant foreign. In its original usage,
then, “barbarian” could be considered a synonym for “the Other.” By so undermining our conceptions of barbarism Montaigne is reducing the otherness of the Other. But he is not obliterating the distinction between the Old World and the New World. In fact, according to him, the Old World itself can be considered an Other by the New World and therefore also exotic and foreign. We have some evidence, incidentally, that Montaigne was undeniably correct: both Aztec and Inca accounts of the conquest do consider the European as the Other.\textsuperscript{13}

Efforts at cross-cultural understanding in the 16th century do not include the adoption of the perspective of the Other. It is all the more indicative, therefore, of Montaigne’s uniqueness in the history of inter-civilizational encounters between the Old and New Worlds that he should be the only 16th-century European to have tried seriously to see things from the natives’ own perspectives. He did so in both “Des Cannibales” and “Des Coches.” In the first essay Montaigne realizes that the natives have their own perspectives on the Europeans, but he does not attempt to enter the Indian mind, perhaps unconsciously reserving that attempt for the second essay.

Toward the end of the first essay Montaigne reports on the reactions of Indians in Europe to a conversation with King Charles the Ninth at Rouen. The Indians had three reactions, of which Montaigne remembers two. First, they thought it odd that strong, tall, well-armed men should willingly submit to obeying a child, instead of choosing someone of their own rank to command them (French ed., 253; English ed., 288). Second, the Indians were puzzled that some Europeans had everything in terms of money, comfort, possessions, and food while the rest were destitute, gaunt with hunger, and forced to live as beggars. They wondered, therefore, why the poor and the destitute did not revolt against the upper classes, seize them by the throat or set fire to their homes (English ed., 288; “prinsent les autres à la gorge, ou missent le feu à leurs maisons”—253). It is ironic that the Indian should have perceived and “advised” what that civilized European, Karl Marx, would perceive and suggest 250 years later. Perhaps the effects of civilization were as shocking to the Indians as cannibalism was to the Europeans.

In “Des Coches,” written eight years after “Des Cannibals,” cannibalism is not mentioned. Why not? By 1588 Montaigne’s knowledge of the New World, deepened by a French version of López de Gómez’s Historia general de las Indias as well as by other works, had led him to the view that there was a world of sometimes startling magnificence (“espouventable magnificence”—1018), an infant world (“un
monde enfant”—1018) which was on the verge of being destroyed by the conquering Europeans. Cannibalism or the existence of other questionable religious or social practices (for instance, Aztec sacrifices, considered by López de Gómara, 89, but overlooked by Montaigne) did not seem as important as the excesses of the European conquest. As Gilbert Chinard noted long ago in L'Exotisme américain dans la littérature française au XVIe siècle (203), Montaigne, motivated by curiosity in “Des Cannibales,” is driven by conscience and by a profound indignation in “Des Coches.” No longer sanguine, he intends among other things to undermine the European’s cultural arrogance. One of the ways he does so—and the one most relevant here—is to adopt the Indian perspective: to imagine the European as the true Other, as the foreigner suddenly violating and penetrating the Indian world. As an act of empathetic imagination, “Des Coches” is perhaps unique in 16th-century letters. Montaigne writes from the Indian perspective in the following passage:

[The natives were amazed] de voir arriver si inopinément des gens barbus, divers en langage, religion, en forme et en contenance, d’un endroit du monde si esloigné et où ils n’avoyent jamais imaginé qu’il y eust habitation quelconque, montez sur des grands monstres incognez, contre ceux qui n’avoyent non seulement jamais veu de cheval, mais beste quelconque duite à porter et soustenir homme ny autre charge; garnis d’un peau luysante et dure et d’une arme trenchante et resplendissante, contre ceux qui, pour le miracle de la lueur d’un mirroir ou d’un cousteau, aluyoyent eschangeant une grande richesse en or et en perles [. . . ]; adjoustez y les foudres et tonnerres de nos pieces et harquebouses, capables de troubler Caesar mesme [. . . ] (1019).

to see so unexpectedly the arrival of bearded men different from themselves in language, in religion, in bearing, and in features, coming from so distant a part of the world which they had never known to be inhabited at all, mounted on great unfamiliar monsters, opposed to those who had never seen, not only a horse, but any beast whatever trained to carry and support a man or any other burden; furnished with a shining and hard skin and armed with a sharp and glittering weapon, opposed to those who bartered great wealth of gold and pearls for the marvel of the gleam of a mirror or of a knife [. . . ]; and furthermore seeing and hearing the lightning and thunder of our cannon and harquebuses, capable of dismaying even Caesar [. . . ] (1236).

Both “Des Cannibales” and “Des Coches” show, I think, how the notion of the Other is culturally conditioned, how subjective that notion finally is, even how arbitrary. Otherness is a negation which depends on difference, a difference not understood or, if understood, not comprehended emotionally. The failure to understand difference results in intolerance, the root of the cultural arrogance which makes conquest and colonization not only possible but desired.
If one searches for 16th-century individuals who were actively involved in the conquest and colonization of the New World (as Montaigne was not), and who would be most likely to understand and sympathize with the ways and the mind of the New Man, then one comes naturally to Bartolomé de Las Casas, the indefatigable champion of Indian rights. However, Las Casas, even as he violently castigated his own countrymen for their cruelty and rapacity, remained resolutely Christian and Spanish in his outlook. Always the evangelizing Christian, he labored to "save" the heathen. Thus, despite the fact that in his *Apologetica historia sumaria* he devotes more than 1,000 pages to proving, among other things, the rationality and hence the fundamental humanity of the American Indian, Las Casas concludes by classifying him as a "barbarian" because he neither possessed the art of writing nor recognized Jesus Christ as the messiah (vol. 2, 653-54). The Other for Las Casas, as it was for the Greeks and the Romans and as it might be for Montaigne, is the "barbarian," but the barbarian for the Spanish priest is neither the foreigner nor the corrupt, civilized European torturer; rather, he is the non-literate and the non-Christian.

In contrast to these attempts to understand the New World and to reduce the otherness of the Other, that otherness was sometimes emphasized to the point of sensationalism. Positive and negative images of the New World and the New Man thus contested for dominance in the 16th-century European mind, and many would say that the struggle continues to the present day. Important in contributing to the negative images, or to what Howard Mumford Jones calls "the anti-image" in *O Strange New World* (51-61), is the representation of cannibalism in 16th-century European iconography, particularly in book illustrations on the subject which circulated throughout Europe.

For the purposes of our argument it is undeniably fortuitous that the subject of the very first illustration to be published about the people of the New World was cannibalism (see fig. 1). This woodcut was issued in Augsburg probably in 1505, though some have dated it as early as 1497 (see Winsor, II, 19), and the original printer is thought to be Johann Froschauer (see Sturtevant, 446). The scene corresponds to the description of Brazilian Indians, the Guarani, in a German translation of a Vespucci letter, which is paraphrased in an inscription to the woodcut (see Sturtevant, 420).
Even more important than this woodcut, however, is a series of woodcuts depicting cannibalism in a book by Hans Staden entitled *Wahrhaftige historia*, printed for the first time in 1557. Hans Staden, a German adventurer, was captured by Brazilian cannibals during one of his two voyages to the New World (1548; 1555). On his return to Germany he published what he labelled a “true account” of his adventures. The book has had an enormous popularity: more than eighty editions have been issued; in Holland alone, during the 16th and 17th centuries, more than twenty-five editions were published (see Fouquet, 157); and it has been translated into at least eight European languages. For most Germans and Northern Europeans of the 16th and 17th centuries, Staden’s *Wahrhaftige historia* was the book on the New Man. How significant it becomes, therefore, that Staden always carefully maintains his distance from the cannibals. Although he can say that he has gone on the warpath with them (“Ich habe einen Kriegszug mit ihnen gemacht”—Staden, 137), he always speaks of “they” and of “their”: “sie,” “ihre Feinde,” “ihre Gebraüche” (Staden, 136-46). And part of the long title of the original edition proclaims it to be the description of a land wild, naked, wrathful man-eaters (“eines Landes der wilden, naktten, grimmigen Menschenfresser”).

*Figure 1. ‘‘Amerikaner’’ (Winsor, II, 19)*
In all, the book has fifty-two woodcuts; of these, eight concern cannibalism and seem to outline the process with some accuracy, from the initial capture of the victims through the ritual slaying and eating. Four of the eight show various stages in the preparation of the flesh, the cooking, and the eating. Their accumulated effect, especially because so many of them depict disfigurement, is undeniably sensationalistic and negative. Quite obviously, the New Man is here THE OTHER.

The following woodcut from Staden (see fig. 2) depicts the dismemberment of the victim in order to prepare it for cooking; I have chosen it because it seems to be the prototype of woodcuts in Thevet and de Bry, to be reproduced shortly. There can be no doubt, writes Sturtevant (433), that Staden either did the woodcuts himself or that he personally supervised their creation.

The first systematic series of illustrations about the New World as a

---

Figure 2. “‘Der Tote wird zerlegt’ (‘The Cadaver is cut up’) (Staden, 144)
whole appeared in late 1557 or early 1558 in a work by André Thevet entitled *Les Singularités de la France antarctique, autrement nommée Amérique* (I have modernized the spelling). Only two of the many illustrations deal with cannibalism; both, however, are modelled after Staden’s woodcuts. The first shows the ritual slaying of the victim; the second (see fig. 3) the procedures which were followed in preparing the cadaver for the banquet:

Staden’s narrative and illustrations, taken together, make clear the following stages, undertaken in strict sequence: first the head and the four limbs are severed from the body; then four women, each with a limb, run around the encampment making loud joyful cries (“machen vor Freude ein grosses Geschrei”); then the body is disembowelled; then the intestines are boiled, and the women and children eat the broth, together with the head and tongue (this is depicted in Staden as “Frauen und Kinder schlurfen Mingáu”—Women and children drink Mingáu, the name of the broth); then the flesh from the limbs and the trunk is roasted (depicted in Staden as “Das Fleisch wird gebraten”) and divided up among the men.

![Figure 3. Untitled (Thevet, f. 77')](https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol12/iss12/3)
and the other people. Finally, everyone goes home. Staden’s narrative and illustrations respect the ritualistic diachronicity of the events of cannibalism. Thevet’s narrative and illustrations do not. Thevet, therefore, is more concerned with a synchronic, schematic arrangement of the elements rather than with a diachronic account. What is gained in Thevet is a composite image—through iconographic documentation—of the New Man. What is lost is an anthropological understanding of cannibalism as a concrete, ritualized process. In this instance, synchronicity leads to an inaccurate account of cannibalism: for example, the children are not supposed to drink Mingáu, nor is the flesh to be roasted, before all four limbs are severed from the body; yet from Thevet’s illustration it appears that the ritual procedure does not matter.

The ritual succession of events is respected in the most famous series of illustrations of cannibalism in the 16th century, those found in the so-called Great Voyages (concerning the Americas and Oceania) and Small Voyages (concerning the East Indies), edited in thirty volumes and published by the de Bry family, between 1590 and 1634. Even more important, however, than a respect for cannibalism as a ritual are the motivational factors at work behind the edition and the illustrations, factors which the work of Bernadette Bucher (Icon and Conquest) has made relatively easy to recover. It is significant, for reasons which shall become evident subsequently, that the order of publication of these volumes does not follow the chronology of events in the discovery and colonization of the New World. That is, the first volume of the Great Voyages covers the English expedition to Virginia; the second the French expedition to Florida. Only with volume three, published in 1592 and which contains the voyages to Brazil of Hans Staden and Jean de Léry, do we come upon the subjects of South American exploration and of cannibalism. And cannibalism is treated before the editors publish an account of Columbus’s departure from Spain and his discovery of America in 1492 (see volume five). More is at issue than merely haphazard editorial practices. England is placed first for a reason. Before we come to that, however, let us briefly consider cannibalism in the volume which contains Hans Staden’s narrative.

More than any other theme in this volume, cannibalism seems to interest the engravers the most, for of the twenty-seven engravings in it nine depict cannibalism, illustrating the process from beginning to end. Again, the woodcuts in Hans Staden serve as models and are followed rather closely, with interesting variations. The scene we have focused on—that of the dismemberment of the body—is shown in figure 4:
Immediately evident, in comparing figure 4 with the preceding ones are the clearly Renaissance conventions concerning notions of proportion and beauty of the human body, a greater interest in fine detail, and an obvious command of perspective, depth, and volume. These artistic "refinements" are due, in part, to the technique of copper engraving which, though available during the preceding one hundred years, was utilized here for the first time to depict cannibalism. The increased naturalism of these refinements carry with them perhaps the effect of greater sensationalism than we found in figures 2 and 3. Since the legs, for instance, look more like human legs, dismemberment is more visually shocking than in Staden. The entrails, also, are clearly distinguishable on the left when the body is dismembered, and on the right when they are thrown into the cooking pot. The child at the lower left is bearing the head toward the pot to be cooked. And since another head is being lowered into the pot at the same time, it would seem that there are two heads but only one body. Perhaps two heads are indeed better than one when the intent is sensationalism. In its spatial organization, figure 4 resembles figure 3; both show several groups of people engaged in cannibalism. However, unlike figure 3 (which in its details does not respect cannibalism as a ritual
process), figure 4 represents acts which all take place during the same stage in the process. From this fact one might conclude that the artist in de Bry has drawn an accurate ethnographic representation.

Such is not the case. The men and women have been “Europeanized” and idealized: the man in the upper right-hand corner, for example, into a patriarch with a flowing beard; the women into young, comely “Rubens nudes.” Some of the men are even bald. In all of this it looks as though the cannibal is being drawn within the European human community, as though he is losing his otherness, as though the distance between the Old and the New World is being radically reduced. However, if we study the following illustration (fig. 5), especially in light of other illustrations in the *Great Voyages*, we will see that the cannibal is being drawn within the human community only to be “classified” as sinful and therefore excluded.

In this regard it is significant that the very first engraving, in volume one, of the entire collection has as its subject the fall of Adam and Eve. Such an engraving “inscribes” (the term belongs to Bucher, 53, and is accurate) the New World within the Old in much the same way that Columbus does when he sees the New Man as the New Adam. In our

![Figure 5. Untitled (De Bry III, 155)](image-url)
terms, from the very beginning of the American adventure the New World is incorporated into the religious and mythic structures of the Old. Inscription and exclusion paradoxically occur particularly in figure 5, where three women with sagging breasts appear. They are not only representative of old age but of witchcraft and gluttony as well. In the 16th-century imagination the deformed old woman (the hag) is associated with witchcraft and therefore with abominable things and with the shadow and taboo side of human life (Bucher, 48). The hags in figure 5 represent a European attempt, whether conscious or not, at displacement, at making the cannibal other than the ordinary European, certainly other than the idealized "Rubens nude." The fact that the woman in the foreground, left, is neither deformed nor old suggests that the attempt has not been explicitly thought through and that two images of the New Man—one positive, one negative—continue to exist simultaneously. Displacement occurs in a subtle way also in that each of the three hags is sucking on her fingers; this detail, states Bucher (49, 50), is a common iconographic allusion to gluttony. Why is this important? Gluttony is one of the seven capital sins; cannibalism, since it does not occur in any culturally significant way in European history (Dante's Ugolino notwithstanding), is not even considered a candidate for one of the seven. In order to make the cannibal into a "sinner," he is made into a glutton. In this way he is inscribed or incorporated (the move toward assimilation) within the European moral framework and also excluded from the community by being placed at its margin (that is, he is defined socially and morally as an Other).

The fact that these illustrations are based on such a minute body of evidence and may even be traced back to a single model (Hans Staden), and that the works of Staden and de Bry were so popular in the 16th and 17th centuries (see Fouquet, 157; Bucher, 11-12), indicate that the elaboration and reelaboration of very little material can go a long way toward creating a pervasive cultural image. The creation and classification, then, of the New Man, not only his discovery. Staden and de Bry, in sum, were instrumental in determining Europe's civilizational attitudes toward the New World.

VI

Let us conclude. Part of the intent of the de Bry family in these illustrations and in the Great Voyages project was certainly sensationalism and publication profits. But the de Brys were not merely
interested in capitalizing on the "barbarism" of the South American Indian. As Bucher points out (9-10, 69f., and elsewhere), the de Bry family, which was Protestant and strongly pro-English (therefore it would make sense for them to begin the entire series of volumes with one on North America), was also anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish. Aided in part by the criticisms of Bartolome de Las Casas, the de Brys zealously highlighted the "barbarism" of the Spanish themselves. Indeed the de Bry editions of Benzoni (Historia del Mondo Nuovo) and Las Casas (Brevisima relacion de la destruccion de Las Indias—this latter edition by de Bry's sons, in 1598, 1599) carried to every corner of Europe the story of Spanish atrocities.

The de Bry family's Protestant, pro-English, anti-Catholic, anti-Spanish, anti-South American Indian bias is clearly evident in the subjects of the engravings in each volume of the Great Voyages. That is, the engravings which portray North American Indians and the English are rarely violent. In volume one, for example, they focus on Indian domestic scenes, on festivities, on agriculture, even on what may be called the orderly transfer of power from Native American to English culture. Central and South American Indians, by contrast, are frequently pictured in more violent activities: war, hunting, cannibalism, sacrifice, murder. Anti-Spanish sentiment surfaces in engravings which show civil war among the Spanish, Balboa throwing Indians to hungry dogs, Spaniards torturing slaves or raping Indian women. These illustrations leave viewers with the impression that not only were the Indians treated more kindly in North America than in Central and South America, but that, also, the North American Indian (and, by extension, the North American continent) was somehow less Other. Of course there were also other reasons—climate, for example—why this expression should have taken hold in 17th and 18th-century Europe. When we see that impression reaffirmed iconographically through edition after edition, and through several centuries of colonial rule, then we understand one of the reasons why, to most Europeans, North America came to appear to be more familiar and, ultimately, more "civilized" than Central or South America.

Cannibalism as a subject and the New Man as cannibal sharply divided Europe from the Americas, especially from Central and South America. Montaigne's was a rather isolated and, finally, culturally ineffective voice in the history of Europe's consciousness of the New World and of cannibalism. Over the long run, however, and in changing intercivilizational contexts, the story of the Other in Latin America cannot be
confined to the thematics of the New Man as cannibal. In fact, the story consists of a series of displacements in the creation of culturally significant Others. What began as the attempt to classify the New Man primarily as one kind of man, the cannibal, eventually became enormously complex. The New Man became the New Men: Aztecs, Mayans, Incas, natural slaves, and, later in the colonial period, mestizos, who even came to be viewed (by Simón Bolívar, José Vasconcelos, and others) as the new hope of mankind. Beneath the increasingly positive and optimistic evaluations of the New Latin Americans, however, there exists even today a European undercurrent of suspicion and skepticism concerning the still-new Latin American world. Those attitudes, which are in part consistent with European attitudes toward all third-world societies, may be considered, in the case of Latin America, the legacy of 15th and 16th-century European notions of the New Man as the savage, the barbarian, the exotic and unknowable Other, and the cannibal.

University of Illinois, Urbana

NOTES

1. See Columbus’s diary entries for November 4, 23, 26; December 11, 13, 17, 26; January (1493) 2, 13, 14, 15, 16. See also Pedro Henríquez-Ureña’s history of the word “Caribe” in his Para la historia de los indigenismos, 95-102; the article by Douglas Taylor on the word in International Journal of American Linguistics, vol. 24 (1958), 156-57.

2. At the opposite ends of the interpretive spectrum concerning cannibalism are what may be called, on the one hand, the psychological interpretations and, on the other, the materialistic ones. Sagan’s study, Cannibalism, is a good example of the psychological (and especially Freudian) orientation toward the subject; for Sagan, cannibalism is the result of the innate human instinct for aggression. Marvin Harris represents the “materialistic” school: he disputes all psychological views on cannibalism, disagrees strongly with Sagan (e.g., 103-104), and attributes cannibalism to “reproductive and ecological pressures” (see Harris, 43, 57, 65-66).

Incidentally, I think it is a mistake to consider cannibalism from cultural or civilizational perspectives in any society in which it is not culturally significant and habitual. Stories of occasional cannibalism—usually survival adventures—never fail to make headlines, but we are not interested in them here. Rather we are interested in cannibalism when it is perceived as a pervasive feature of a particular society or people.

3. Julio Salas, for example, in Los indios caribes. Estudio sobre el origen del mito de la antropofagia (passim), sets out to prove that the Caribbean Indians were not cannibals and that everyone who said they were (including Columbus, Vespucci, and others) was lying. Cannibalism, insists Salas, is a myth foisted upon Latin America by imperialistic Euro-
peans and should be treated accordingly. It is a myth like the existence of the Amazons, El Dorado, dog-headed men, and people who are born with tails. See also W. Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (1979).

Forty to fifty years after Salas, the practitioners of *realismo mágico* in Latin American literature would not be so opposed to the "mythical" aspects of their reality. In fact, Gabriel García Márquez, in *Cien años de soledad (One Hundred Years of Solitude)*, makes the child born with the tail of a pig central to the thematics of his novel: that child is the punishment for the violation of the incest taboo, a punishment which culminates in the destruction of the Buendía family and their town, Macondo. In interviews, García Márquez has said that he thought that he invented the story, only to discover later that, in Barranquilla (Colombia), someone *had* been born with the tail of a pig. What García Márquez did not realize or did not admit in this instance was that in writing of the phenomenon in this way in his novel he was aligning himself with a venerable folk tradition in Latin America, a tradition which he first heard, as a young boy, at his grandmother's knee. Myth, in sum, is never far from historical reality in Latin America.

4. Otherness is a term and concept at the heart of our analysis and is sometimes used by Latin Americans and Europeans to discuss cultural issues. Tzvetan Todorov, for instance, emphasizes it in his recent book on the conquest of America. He does not discuss "the Other," however, in terms of cannibalism and the cannibal. Neither does Todorov consider the iconography of cannibalism.

5. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Spanish, German, French, Italian and Latin in this essay are mine.

6. This text exists in another form which gives the opposite meaning. The Barcelona Arcadia edition of the first voyage states that "el Almirante no lo creyó" (*Diario de a bordo*, 111). Either reading can be supported by the context and, not having the manuscripts at hand, I do not know which one is correct.

7. I have used my own translation (improved by my colleague David Bright of the Classics Department) because the English version I consulted contained too many outright errors and lacunae. See Peter Martyr D'Anghera, *De Orbe Novo*, translated by Francis Augustus MacNutt, vol I (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), 63.

8. It may be objected that, because of Vespucci's reputation for embellishment and self-aggrandizement, it is difficult to take seriously anything he says, including his remarks about cannibalism. For most interpretations, this objection would carry considerable force. Since, however, we are more interested in European *attitudes* toward cannibalism and the cannibal than we are in determining whether or not a certain voyage took place, we think it reasonable critical practice to cite those passages, whatever their actual truth value, which are important in specifying Vespucci's attitudes. Incidentally, no such doubt concerning Vespucci's veracity exists about the Bartolozzi letter.

9. For a concise description of the differences between the edenic, utopian and arcadian traditions, see Harry Levin (3-31; especially the diagram on p. 9). In general, see also Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel (passim).

10. Belief in the physical existence of a Terrestrial Paradise was not unusual among Europeans at least through the 17th century. In the climate of 16th-century exploration, scholars speculated as to which nation would discover the Terrestrial Paradise first. Because of its seamanship and experience, Portugal was the odds-on favorite (see Scammell, 409). In 1656, Antonio de León Pinelo, a Spanish scholar who had lived in the New World for twenty years, wrote a two-volume work demonstrating that the Garden of Eden lay in the center of South America. That garden was bathed by four great rivers, known in the Bible
by other names: the Plate, the Orinoco, the Amazon, and the Magdalena. He even drew a map of Eden, entitling it *Continens Paradisi* (see also Rosenblat, 24).

Although Paradise has always been thought to exist in some other place and time than here and now (this is the central displacement of Judeo-Christian thought), and although it is true that Europeans looked for Paradise, first, in the Middle East and the Far East, then in Africa (especially in Ethiopia), and finally in the Americas, it would be a grave exaggeration to consider, as Henri Baudet does in his study (*Paradise on Earth: Some Thoughts on European Images of Non-European Man*), the European attitude toward the Non-European man to be largely one of admiration and respect for all those qualities which the European himself lacks. In fact, the opposite is at least equally true. To document that is part, but only part, of the *raison d'être* of this essay.

11. Reading this sentence, and indeed all of Vespucci's writings on his voyages to Brazil, one might naturally conclude that he commanded the expeditions. That was not the case. They were commanded by Gonçalo Coelho, who is never mentioned by Vespucci.

12. For Philip P. Hallie, in *The Scar of Montaigne* (17-20), the notion given the greatest value in "Des Cannibals" is good health. That is to say, the cannibals are supremely healthy. Their health stems, says Hallie (and here his thought and mine intersect), from nature. Cannibals live in harmony with their surroundings, respecting the "natural" order of things, and Europeans might do well to recognize the variety of natural orders in the world and to tolerate them.

13. For the Aztec account see Miguel León-Portilla's anthology and Bernardino de Sahagún's compilation. For the Inca version see Nathan Wachtel's work.

14. Justin Winsor notes (II, 19) that the German inscription at the bottom of the woodcut is to be translated as follows:

> This figure represents to us the people and island which have been discovered by the Christian King of Portugal, or his subjects. The people are thus naked, handsome, brown, well-shaped in body; their heads, necks, arms, private parts, feet of men and women, are a little covered with feathers. The men also have many precious stones on their faces and breasts. No one else has anything, but all things are in common. And the men have as wives those who please them, be they mothers, sisters, or friends; therein make they no distinction. They also fight with each other; they also eat each other, even those who are slain, and hang the flesh of them in the smoke. They become a hundred and fifty years of age, and have no government.

The woodcut, with the inscription (which is legible), is reproduced in Sturtevant, following p. 424. The English translation is accurate.

15. As the book collector Henry N. Stevens has pointed out (272-274), there is no such thing as uniformity (in leaves, in maps, in plates) among the various editions (in different languages and even in the same language) of De Bry's books. Some editions will omit some plates; some will repeat plates. A perusal of several original editions in Latin and in German at the University of Illinois Archives, and a perusal as well of several bibliographical descriptions of De Bry's *Voyages*, has led me to conclude that not all nine plates illustrating cannibalism are in every edition, and in the order in which they were perhaps conceived. And the fact that the plates are frequently indiscriminately placed in relation to the narrative in the text (this is the case with our figure 5, for instance) suggests that anthropological and historical accuracy mattered little to the De Brys.

16. Exactly the same engraving is reproduced again in volume three, in both the Latin and the German editions I have consulted, and is the first one to "illustrate" Jean de Léry's
voyage to Brazil. Jean de Léry’s experiences are therefore doubly inscribed within the Christian tradition.

17. Though perhaps no European equalled Montaigne’s tolerance of cannibalism, at least two came close: in the 16th century, Jean de Léry, like Montaigne, saw more cruelty in Europe’s religious wars than in cannibalism per se; and in the 18th century, the historian Francisco Javier Clavigero (who was born in Mexico but lived most of his productive life in Italy) defended the practice of cannibalism by saying that it was known among the Greeks and therefore not foreign to European civilization. See Gerbi, 260-61.

A fairly common device in 18th-century literature—though I do not know if Montaigne is to be considered the source for it—was that of “documenting” the non-European traveller’s views of Europe. Voltaire used this device, but it was Montesquieu’s Lettres persannes which had the most imitators.

18. The subject belongs to a much broader and very important topic in civilizational analysis: that of the confrontation between the European and the non-European, wherever it takes place, be it in North or South America, in Africa or the Middle East, in India or Japan, or in the South Pacific. This topic was “popular” 70 or 80 years ago, and is now once again receiving the serious critical attention it deserves. In 1976, Urs Bitterli published a panoramic and detailed survey of the problem (the work has not yet been translated into English). More recent are two studies more limited in terms of both size and scope than Bitterli’s: an account of James Cook’s effects on the Sandwich Islands Kingdom, published in 1981 by Marshall Sahlins; and a study of the topoi to be found in European descriptions of the South Pacific, published in 1983 by Conrad Veit.

WORKS CITED


Bitterli, Urs. Die “Wilden” und die “Zivilisierten” (Munich, 1976).


_____ De Orbe Novo. Tr. by Francis Augustus MacNutt (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912).


Rosenblat, Angel. La primera visión de América y otros estudios (Caracas: Ministerio de Educación, Departamento de Publicaciones, 1965).


Salas, Julio. Los indios Caribes: Estudio sobre el origen del mito de la antropofagia (Barcelona: Talleres Gráficos “Lux”, 1921).


