

MARVELOUS POSSESSIONS

The Wonder of the New World

With a New Preface

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Introduction



WHEN I was a child, my favorite books were *The Arabian Nights* and Richard Halliburton's *Book of Marvels*. The appeal of the former, even in what I assume was a grotesquely reduced version, lay in the primal power of storytelling. Some years ago, in the Djeema El Fnah in Marrakesh, I joined the charmed circle of listeners seated on the ground around the professional story-teller and attended uncomprehendingly to his long tale. In the peculiar reverie that comes with listening to a language one does not understand, hearing it as an alien music, knowing only that a tale is being told, I allowed my mind to wander and discovered that I was telling myself one of the stories from the Arabian Nights, the tale of Sinbad and the roc. If it is true, as Walter Benjamin writes, that every real story 'contains, openly or covertly, something useful',¹ then that tale, of diamonds, deep caverns, snakes, raw meat, and birds with huge talons, must have impressed itself upon my prepubescent imagination as containing something extremely useful, something I should never forget. The utility, in this particular case, has remained hidden from me, but I am reasonably confident that it will be someday revealed. And I remain possessed by stories and obsessed with their complex uses.

The appeal of Halliburton's *Book of Marvels* is less easy to explain. Halliburton was a popular American traveler and journalist. He wrote in what now seems to me a dismayingly exclamatory and hyperventilating

manner, as if he believed in some part of himself that his marvels were not all that marvelous and needed to be rhetorically enhanced for the marketplace. But, even in a debased form, *The Book of Marvels* was in touch with what Michel de Certeau calls ‘the joyful and silent experience of childhood: . . . to be other and to move toward the other.’² And I suppose that my suburban soul, constricted by the conventionality of the Eisenhower 1950s, eagerly embraced the relief that Halliburton offered, the sense that the real world was full of wonder, the wide-eyed account of exotic travels—Iguassu Falls, Chichén Itzá, the Golden Gate Bridge. It was Halliburton’s trademark to put himself into danger in order to witness or verify his marvels: he flew a light plane perilously close to the raging waters of Iguassu Falls, he jumped into the Pool of Sacrifices at Chichen and swam to safety, I suppose he drove at rush hour across the Golden Gate Bridge. I shouldn’t make light of his daring; as if to prove that the risks he was taking were real, Halliburton disappeared on one of his voyages and was never heard from again.

At a certain point I passed from the naïve to what Schiller calls the sentimental—that is, I stopped reading books of marvels and began reading ethnographies and novels—but my childhood interests have survived in a passionate curiosity about other cultures and a fascination with tales. It will not escape anyone who reads this book that my chapters are constructed largely around anecdotes, what the French call *petites histoires*, as distinct from the *grand récit* of totalizing, integrated, progressive history, a history that knows where it is going.³ As is appropriate for voyagers who thought that they knew where they were going and ended up in a place whose existence they had never imagined, the discourse of travel in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance is rarely if ever interesting at the level of sustained narrative and teleological design, but gripping at the level of the anecdote. The sense of overarching scheme is certainly present in this discourse, most often in the conviction of the inexorable progress from East to West of Christianity or empire or both, but compared to the luminous universal histories of the early Middle Ages, the chronicles of exploration seem uncertain of their bearings, disorganized, fragmentary. Their strength lies not in a vision of the Holy Spirit’s gradual expansion through the world but in the shock of the unfamiliar, the provocation of an intense curiosity, the local excitement of discontinuous wonders. Hence they present the world not in stately and harmonious order but in a succession of brief encounters, random experiences, isolated anecdotes of the unanticipated. For the anecdote, which is linked at least etymologically with the unpublished, is the principal register of the unexpected and hence

of the encounter with difference that is at once initiated and epitomized by Columbus's marvelous landfall in an unimagined hemisphere that blocked his access to the eastern end of the known world.

If anecdotes are registers of the singularity of the contingent—associated (to introduce the Mandevillian terms I will discuss in the next chapter) with the rim rather than the immobile and immobilizing center—they are at the same time recorded as *representative* anecdotes, that is, as significant in terms of a larger progress or pattern that is the proper subject of a history perennially deferred in the traveler's relation of further anecdotes. A purely local knowledge, an absolutely singular, unrepeatable, unique experience or observation, is neither desirable nor possible, for the traveler's discourse is meant to be useful, even if the ultimate design in which this utility will be absorbed remains opaque. Anecdotes then are among the principal products of a culture's representational technology, mediators between the undifferentiated succession of local moments and a larger strategy toward which they can only gesture. They are seized in passing from the swirl of experiences and given some shape, a shape whose provisionality still marks them as contingent—otherwise, we would give them the larger, grander name of history—but also makes them available for telling and retelling.

My own traveler's anecdotes are bound up with those that I study, shaped by a similar longing for the effect of the locally real and by a larger historicizing intention that is at once evoked and deflected. An example: in August, 1986, on a tourist's typical first night in Bali, I walked by moonlight on narrow paths through silent rice paddies glittering with fireflies. I reached a tiny village which in the darkness I identified less by the low, half-hidden huts and temples than by the frenzied barking of the dogs at my approach. I saw a light from the *bale banjar*, the communal pavilion in which I knew—from having read Clifford Geertz and Miguel Covarrubias and Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead—that the Balinese gathered in the evenings. I drew near and discovered that the light came from a television set that the villagers, squatting or sitting cross-legged, were intent on watching. Conquering my disappointment, I accepted the gestured invitation to climb onto the platform and see the show: on the communal VCR, they were watching a tape of an elaborate temple ceremony. Alerted by the excited comments and whoops of laughter, I recognized in the genial crowd of television watchers on the platform several of the ecstatic celebrants, dancing in trance states, whom I was seeing on the screen.

We may call what I witnessed that evening the assimilation of the other,

a phrase it is well to leave deliberately ambiguous.⁴ For if the television and the VCR and, for that matter, my presence on the platform suggested the astonishing pervasiveness of capitalist markets and technology, their extension into the furthest corners of the earth, the Balinese adaptation of the latest Western and Japanese modes of representation seemed so culturally idiosyncratic and resilient that it was unclear who was assimilating whom.⁵ The villagers had purchased a sophisticated version of international capitalism's representational machinery, its leading device at the moment for the production, reproduction, and transmission of cultural texts. The immense transformative power of that device, its ability to diminish difference by initiating relatively isolated and autonomous cultures into the imagery and values of the world system, has been amply demonstrated around the globe. But the VCR allows a surprising amount of local autonomy, and what I witnessed was the pleasure of self-representation, as the villagers had their own bodies and voices and music enter the machine and be projected back at them. Whose ideological triumph is being registered here? Whose possession is disclosed? Representational practices are ideologically significant—it is the purpose of this book to explore some aspects of this significance—but I think it is important to resist what we may call *a priori* ideological determinism, that is, the notion that particular modes of representation are inherently and necessarily bound to a given culture or class or belief system, and that their effects are unidirectional.

The alternative is not to imagine that representational modes are neutral or even that they give themselves over, like Chekhov's 'Darling,' to whoever has embraced them, but to acknowledge that individuals and cultures tend to have fantastically powerful assimilative mechanisms, mechanisms that work like enzymes to change the ideological composition of foreign bodies. Those foreign bodies do not disappear altogether but they are drawn into what Homi Bhabha terms the inbetween, the zone of intersection in which all culturally determinate significations are called into question by an unresolved and unresolvable hybridity.⁶ Even representational technologies that require highly specialized equipment along with an infrastructure that includes electric generators, the accumulation of so-called hard currency, and the middlemen and customs bureaucracy in Tokyo, Jakarta, and Denpasar are not unequivocally and irreversibly the bearers of the capitalist ideology that was the determining condition of their original creation and their expansion throughout the world. In the case of the Balinese television set, there is not only the remarkable adaptive power of the local community but a distinct sense conveyed by that

community that the adaptation is not all that remarkable, that nothing very novel is occurring, that no great expenditure of collective energy is engaged in the assimilation of the other.

At first I accounted for my impression as a consequence of the gracefulness for which the Balinese are justly famous, but a few days later it received a sharper focus when I milled about in the town of Amlapura with an enormous crowd celebrating Indonesian Independence Day. I had hoped to see some traditional *legong* dances, which were to take place on the stage of the large movie theater on the town square, but by the time I arrived the dances were over and the current movie, Charles Bronson's *Death Wish II*, was about to begin, a free screening that evening on the occasion of the holiday. Across the square another movie was already showing on a large makeshift screen—evidently a comedy about rich yuppies in Jakarta. The film, depicting people whose language, religion, and sense of identity are far different from those of the Balinese, was also being shown in honor of the celebration, a gesture then toward that cultural assimilation of Bali that Javanese have been attempting to achieve, most often by considerably less genial means, for centuries. Finally, against the side wall of the movie theater, and jutting into the square, someone had constructed a rough trestle stage on which had been erected yet another screen, stretched across a wooden frame. Behind this screen, which was lit by a coconut oil lamp, was an aged *dalang*, a mystic story-teller. The *dalang* sat cross-legged beside a coffin-like box out of which he took, one by one, exquisite puppets cut from buffalo parchment and arrayed them before him. He then began to perform with amazing dexterity a *wayang kulit*, a shadow puppet play based upon episodes from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

The Balinese were moving gaily and apparently at random from one of these shows to another, crowding in to witness a few illuminating minutes of American screen violence, moving outside to listen to the chanting of the *dalang* and watch the shadow puppets flickering across the screen, squeezing in behind that screen to watch the *dalang* manipulate the puppets, crossing the square to see the gilded youth in Jakarta race around in red sports cars. In the context of this festive perambulation, the villagers whom on my first night I had seen huddled together before the television set seemed part of a larger Balinese fascination with images on screens. Though the *wayang* scaffold was propped against the movie house, it seemed far more plausible symbolically at least to imagine the movie house propped against the ancient puppet theater, with its intimations of the unreality of the world.

But it is not the question of cultural origins or priority that most interests me here.⁷ Rather I want to emphasize the multiple sites of representation and the crowd's movement among them, for they suggest that the problem of the assimilation of the other is linked to what we may call, adapting Marx, *the reproduction and circulation of mimetic capital*. There are three reasons why it is worth invoking 'capital' here. First, and most obvious, I want to insist on the crucial connection between mimesis and capitalism, for, though the Roman Empire and Christianity provided impressive precedents, in the modern world-order it is with capitalism that the proliferation and circulation of representations (and devices for the generation and transmission of representations) achieved a spectacular and virtually inescapable global magnitude. This magnitude—the will and the ability to cross immense distances and, in the search for profit, to encounter and to represent radically unfamiliar human and natural objects—is the enabling condition for the particular experiences with which this book will be concerned. Second, I want to convey the sense of a stockpile of representations, a set of images and image-making devices that are *accumulated*, 'banked,' as it were, in books, archives, collections, cultural storehouses, until such time as these representations are called upon to generate new representations. The images that matter, that merit the term capital, are those that achieve reproductive power, maintaining and multiplying themselves by transforming cultural contacts into novel and often unexpected forms. And third, I want to suggest that mimesis, as Marx said of capital, is a social relation of production. I take this to mean that any given representation is not only the reflection or product of social relations but that it is itself a social relation, linked to the group understandings, status hierarchies, resistances, and conflicts that exist in other spheres of the culture in which it circulates. This means that representations are not only products but producers, capable of decisively altering the very forces that brought them into being.

This emphasis on the productive power of representation should not lead to a collapse of the distinction between mimetic practice and any other kind of social practice. It is important to grasp that mimetic capital—the stock of images, along with the means of producing those images and circulating them according to prevailing market forces—is differentiated from other, non-mimetic forms of capital. Cultures are not altogether an assemblage of screens, or texts, or performances. In concentrating on mimetic capital, we can get at certain important qualities—the multiple, interconnected sites of representation, the mobility of spectacle and spectator alike, the unreality of images paradoxically linked to the dazzling

power of display—but we also risk ignoring other important qualities: modes of non-mimetic production as well as reproduction, presentation as well as representation, reality as well as simulation. It is, I think, a theoretical mistake and a practical blunder to collapse the distinction between representation and reality, but at the same time we cannot keep them isolated from one another. They are locked together in an uneasy marriage in a world without ecstatic union or divorce.

The authors of the anecdotes with which this book concerns itself were liars—few of them *steady* liars, as it were, like Mandeville, but frequent and cunning liars none the less, whose position virtually required the strategic manipulation and distortion and outright suppression of the truth. But though they were liars, European voyagers to the New World were not systematic, so that we cannot have the hermeneutic satisfaction of stripping away their false representations to arrive at a secure sense of reality. Instead we find ourselves groping uneasily among the mass of textual traces, instances of brazen bad faith jostling homely (and often equally misleading) attempts to tell the truth.

In the chapters that follow I have tried less to distinguish between true and false representations than to look attentively at the nature of the representational practices that the Europeans carried with them to America and deployed when they tried to describe to their fellow countrymen what they saw and did. I have been very wary of taking anything Europeans wrote or drew as an accurate and reliable account of the nature of the New World lands and its peoples. It is almost impossible, I find, to make this skepticism an absolute and unwavering principle—I catch myself constantly straining to read into the European traces an account of what the American natives were ‘really’ like—but I have resisted as much as I can the temptation to speak for or about the native cultures as if the mediation of European representations were an incidental consideration, easily corrected for. At this time and place it is particularly tempting to take the most admiring European descriptions of the ‘Indians’ as if they were transparent truths and to reserve epistemological suspicion for the most hostile accounts, but this strategy produces altogether predictable, if sentimentally appealing, results. We can be certain only that European representations of the New World tell us something about the European practice of representation: this seems like a modest enough claim, but I hope this book will show that it rewards exploration. I should add that if I do not put terms like ‘New World,’ ‘Indian,’ and ‘discovery’ in quotations, it is only

because I think that in the texts I am considering such terms can never be detached from European projections.

But can we legitimately speak of ‘the European practice of representation’? There were profound differences among the national cultures and religious faiths of the various European voyagers, differences that decisively shaped both perceptions and representations. Hence, for example, when the English Protestant Thomas Harriot describes the religious rites of the Algonquians, he notes that their carved posts resemble ‘the faces of Nonnes couered with theyr vayles,’ and his collaborator John White represents the scene accordingly. Similarly, the Calvinist Jean de Léry polemically compares the cannibalism of the savage Brazilian people known as Ouetaca with the Catholicism of the French expedition’s leader, Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon, who ‘wanted to eat the flesh of Jesus Christ raw.’⁸ It is not only a matter of polemics: Catholics and Protestants tended to ask different questions, notice different things, fashion different images.⁹ The differences are sufficiently great to allow a scholar of the seventeenth century to speak of a specifically ‘Protestant poetics,’ and, if it would be more difficult to do so for the earlier period with which we are concerned, there are from the inception of the Reformation ample reasons to make distinctions.¹⁰ On crucially important matters—the significance of ritual and festivity, the process of conversion, the nature of gifts, the way Christians should deal with the false beliefs of others, and the authority that secured and legitimized interpretation—there had emerged, by the time of the second generation of European voyagers to the New World, highly visible divisions, divisions that not only marked the distinction between Catholic and Protestant but cut each of the groups into smaller fragments. Hence it would be possible to differentiate fruitfully between Franciscan and Dominican representations of the New World, and between Calvinist and Lutheran. And then, of course, these distinctions would have to be further elaborated with reference to the very considerable differences among national cultures and social classes and professions.

These differences figure importantly in my account, but I have tried not to lose sight of all that was shared by the quite diverse European voyagers to the New World. For European mimetic capital, though diverse and internally competitive, easily crossed the boundaries of nation and creed, and it therefore seemed to me a mistake to accord those boundaries an absolute respect. Certainly the age’s greatest technological device for the circulation of mimetic capital, the printing press, was no respecter of national or doctrinal borders. Richard Hakluyt’s intensely patriotic and staunchly Protestant *Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, & Discoveries*

of the English Nation somehow managed to include Giovanni de Pian Carpini, William of Rubruck, and Odoric of Pordenone. Catholic and Protestant polemicists of the period made much of their differences, each accusing the other of atrocities, but both decency and horror, like the capacity to represent, seem distributed fairly evenly. In any case, after the momentous events of 1989 and 1990, it is easier than at any time since the late fifteenth century to perceive all of the ways that Europe has a common culture and destiny.

The Europeans who ventured to the New World in the first decades after Columbus's discovery shared a complex, well-developed, and, above all, mobile technology of power: writing, navigational instruments, ships, war-horses, attack dogs, effective armor, and highly lethal weapons, including gunpowder. Their culture was characterized by immense confidence in its own centrality, by a political organization based on practices of command and submission, by a willingness to use coercive violence on both strangers and fellow countrymen, and by a religious ideology centered on the endlessly proliferated representation of a tortured and murdered god of love. The cult of this male god—a deity whose earthly form was born from the womb of a virgin and sacrificed by his heavenly father to atone for human disobedience—in turn centered on a ritual (highly contested, of course, by the second decade of the sixteenth century and variously interpreted) in which the god's flesh and blood were symbolically eaten. Such was the confidence of this culture that it expected perfect strangers—the Arawaks of the Caribbean, for example—to abandon their own beliefs, preferably immediately, and embrace those of Europe as luminously and self-evidently true. A failure to do so provoked impatience, contempt, and even murderous rage.

With a very few exceptions, Europeans felt powerfully superior to virtually all of the peoples they encountered, even those like the Aztecs who had technological and organizational skills that Europeans could recognize and greatly admire. The sources of this sense of superiority are sometimes difficult to specify, though the Christians' conviction that they possessed an absolute and exclusive religious truth must have played a major part in virtually all of their cultural encounters. On many occasions, this conviction was bound up with what Samuel Purchas in the early seventeenth century called the Europeans' 'literall advantage'—the advantage, that is, of writing. The narcissism that probably always attaches to one's own speech was intensified by the possession of a technology of preservation and reproduction. It is not clear if the illiterate sailors and soldiers basked in the reflected glory of this technology, but those who wrote the books—

those therefore with whose testimony we are left—saw writing as a decisive mark of superiority. God gave man reason and speech, Purchas writes, a double endowment beyond the natural capacity of any other ‘sensitive Creatures.’ The two special gifts function together: speech distinguishes man from the animals by uniting diverse individuals into a social community founded on reason. But there is another divine endowment and another distinction: ‘God hath added herein a further grace, that as Men by the former exceed Beasts, so hereby one man may excell another; and amongst Men, some are accounted Civill, and more both Sociable and Religious, by the Use of letters and Writing, which others wanting are esteemed Brutish, Savage, Barbarous.’¹¹

Purchas’s use of the term ‘barbarous’ signals an important shift from the Greek distinction between self and other, a distinction based on the difference between those who spoke Greek and those who did not. In Purchas the linguistic community is assumed to have a legitimate multiplicity; the crucial difference is a technological one—the achievement of literacy—but this technology is understood to have implications well beyond a certain quantitative difference. For Purchas the key to ‘the litterall advantage’ is the fact that speech, as he conceives it, is limited to the present moment and the present auditors:

by speech we utter our minds once, at the present, to the present, as present occasions move (and perhaps unadvisedly transport) us: but by writing Man seemes immortall, conferreth and consulteth with the Patriarks, Prophets, Apostles, Fathers, Philosophers, Historians, and learns the wisdome of the Sages which have been in all times before him; yea by translations or learning the Languages, in all places and Regions of the World: and lastly, by his owne writings surviveth himself, remains (litera scripta manet) thorow all ages a Teacher and Counsellor to the last of men: yea hereby God holds conference with men, and in his sacred Scriptures, as at first in the Tables of Stone, speakes to all. (p. 486)

For Purchas, then, as for many other Europeans, those who possess writing have a past, a history, that those without access to letters necessarily lack.¹² And since God ‘speakes to all’ through writing, unlettered cultures (as distinct from illiterate individuals) are virtually excluded by definition from the human community: ‘Want of Letters hath made some so seely as to thinke the Letter it selfe could speak, so much did the Americans herein admire the Spaniards, seeming in comparison of the other as speaking Apes’ (pp. 486–7).¹³ Seeming so to whom—to the Americans themselves, to the Catholic Spaniards, or to the Protestant Purchas? Purchas doesn’t bother to specify, because the difference between Spaniard and Englishman, Catholic and Protestant, fades before the massive cultural difference,

as he conceives it, between European and American, lettered and unlettered, and therefore 'civilized' and 'barbarous.'

Purchas's overweening cultural confidence and religious dogmatism have somewhat receded, at least in academic circles,¹⁴ but his notion of the 'literall advantage' continues to find powerful support. In a thoughtful and disturbing book that has helped to set the agenda of my own study, Tzvetan Todorov has argued that the crucial cultural difference between European and American peoples was the presence or absence of writing, and that this difference virtually determined the outcome of their encounter: 'the absence of writing is an important element of the situation, perhaps even *the* most important.' Todorov drastically minimizes Mayan and Aztec writing: the pictograms used by the latter 'are not a lesser degree of writing,' he writes; 'they note the experience, not the language.'¹⁵ Even the most culturally sophisticated of the Mesoamerican peoples, in this account, did not merely lack certain important refinements in the art of writing; they lacked the thing itself, the essential concept, and hence they lacked the communicative, symbolic, and interpretive skills that at once fashion and are fashioned by writing.

In Todorov's view, the consequence for American cultures was not (as Purchas or Léry thought) a loss of the past—their production of formal discourse, he observes, was dominated by memory—but rather a fatal loss of manipulative power in the present. The absence of writing determined the predominance of ritual over improvisation and cyclical time over linear time, characteristics that in turn led to disastrous misperceptions and miscalculations in the face of the *conquistadores*. The unlettered peoples of the New World could not bring the strangers into focus; conceptual inadequacy severely impeded, indeed virtually precluded, an accurate perception of the other. The culture that possessed writing could accurately represent to itself (and hence strategically manipulate) the culture without writing, but the reverse was not true. For in possessing the ability to write, the Europeans possessed, Todorov argues, an unmistakably superior representational technology: 'There is a "technology" of symbolism, which is as capable of evolution as the technology of tools, and, in this perspective, the Spaniards are more "advanced" than the Aztecs (or to generalize: societies possessing writing are more advanced than societies without writing), even if we are here concerned only with a difference of degree' (p. 160).

The slight uneasiness registered in the quotations placed around the word 'advanced' is well-taken,¹⁶ for there seems to me no convincing evidence that writing functioned in the early encounter of European and New World peoples as a superior tool for the accurate perception or

effective manipulation of the other. Monuments to writing are built by writers: from the midst of the system within which our knowledge of the world is organized, we take legitimate pleasure in our own tools. But it is a leap from this pleasure to faith in what Todorov calls 'the evolution of the symbolic apparatus proper to man' (p. 160), a leap that should give us pause. And it is a further leap—across a chasm at least as great—from this general celebration of writing to the particular dealings between Cortés and Montezuma. In his encounter with Cortés, Montezuma made fatal strategic mistakes; the outcome suggests that Cortés evidently made fewer mistakes. But where is the link between his success and his culture's possession of writing or, for that matter, between the Aztec failure and their supposed lack of writing? There is a demonstrable linguistic element to the Spanish triumph which I will discuss in Chapters 4 and 5 at some length, but that element is the possession not of writing but of competent translators.¹⁷ Montezuma had no one who was even remotely the equivalent of Cortés's loyal bilingual informants and go-betweens, Geronimo de Aguilar and the indispensable Doña Marina.¹⁸

Translation and communication were crucial, but the ability to communicate effectively is a quite different matter from the ability through writing or any other means to perceive and represent reality. It may be that the Europeans' possession of writing (and their impression that the New World natives did not) increased the *conquistadores'* self-confidence, but neither confidence nor success is a reliable indicator of superior access to reality. On the contrary, it has been persuasively argued that the Spanish misperceived some of the fundamental principles of Aztec culture.¹⁹ It is equally likely that the Aztecs misperceived the other—for example, by assuming initially that Cortés was somehow linked to the culture-hero Quetzalcoatl—but there is no evidence that this misperception was caused by their supposed lack of writing. In other words, there is nothing in the available symbolic technology of either of the peoples that would determine a greater or lesser access to the truth of things.

My book is about early European responses to the New World and hence about the uses of symbolic technology, but I am skeptical of any attempt to translate the historical record of these uses into conclusions about the relative epistemological merits of the tools with which the Europeans were endowed in comparison with those of the Americans. The responses with which I am concerned—indeed the only responses I have been able to identify—are not detached scientific assessments but what I would call engaged representations, representations that are relational, local, and historically contingent. Their overriding interest is not know-

ledge of the other but practice upon the other; and, as I shall try to show, the principal faculty involved in generating these representations is not reason but imagination.

Great as the difference was between themselves and the natives, almost all European voyagers believed that they could communicate across it through the giving of gifts and the display of representations. An entry in Columbus's log-book for December 18, 1492, will serve to introduce these attempts at communication, which I will examine at some length in the chapters that follow. On his ship, anchored off the island of Tortuga, Columbus is visited by a young and impressively dignified native 'king' and several of his 'counsellors':

I saw that he was pleased with a coverlet that I had on my bed. I gave it to him and some very good amber beads that I wore on my neck, and some red shoes, and a flask of orange-flower water, with which he was so pleased that it was a marvel. And he and his tutor and counsellors were very troubled because they did not understand me nor I them. Nevertheless I gathered that he told me that if something from this place pleased me that the whole island was at my command. I sent for some beads of mine on which, as a token, I have a gold *excelente* on which Your Highnesses are sculptured, and I showed it to him; and again, as yesterday, I told him how Your Highnesses commanded and ruled over all the best part of the world, and that there were no other princes as great. And I showed him the royal banners and the others bearing the cross, which he esteemed greatly. What great lords Your Highnesses must be, he said (speaking toward his counsellors), since from so far away and from the heavens they had sent me here without fear; and many other things passed between them that I did not understand, except that I saw well that they took everything as a great wonder.²⁰

I am fascinated by the move, here and elsewhere, from knowing nothing ('they did not understand me nor I them') to imagining an absolute possession ('the whole island was at my command'). Columbus could have simply appealed to his sense of overwhelming power: in his log-book he had just noted complacently (and, as it turned out, incorrectly) that a few armed Spaniards could easily command the entire population. But instead he represents the move toward sovereign possession as the result of an act of interpretation, a deciphering of the native's words and gestures: 'I gathered that he told me. . . .' Columbus imagines—and invites his readers, above all the king and queen, to imagine—a scene of legitimate appropriation, an appropriation enabled, through a mechanism at once institutional and psychic, by the giving of gifts and the display of what must have been to the natives utterly incomprehensible representations: the portrait of the king stamped on a gold coin, the royal banners, the cross. The weirdness of these displays is at once repressed in a palpable lie—

though he has just acknowledged that he did not understand the native 'king's' language nor the 'king' his, Columbus reports a speech flattering at once to himself and to the Spanish sovereigns—and at the same time registered at least indirectly in the natives' 'wonder.' Wonder is, I shall argue, the central figure in the initial European response to the New World, the decisive emotional and intellectual experience in the presence of radical difference: it is quite possible that the people whom Columbus was encountering also experienced, as he reports, a sense of wonder, but here as elsewhere in the account of the other we principally learn something about the writer of the account.

Nil admirari, the ancient maxim taught. But, in the presence of the New World, the classical model of mature, balanced detachment seemed at once inappropriate and impossible. Columbus's voyage initiated a century of intense wonder. European culture experienced something like the 'startle reflex' one can observe in infants: eyes widened, arms outstretched, breathing stilled, the whole body momentarily convulsed. But what does it mean to experience wonder? What are its origins, its uses, and its limits? Is it closer to pleasure or pain, longing or horror? Is it a sign and an agent of renunciation or possession? The ambiguities of wonder in the New World may be suggested by a passage from Jean de Léry's great *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*. A Huguenot pastor, Léry lived for several months in 1557 among the Tupinamba in the Bay of Rio. During this stay he and two other Frenchmen (one of them a Norman interpreter) had occasion, he writes, to witness a solemn religious assembly of the natives. What he saw and heard amazed and frightened him:

While we were having our breakfast, with no idea as yet of what they intended to do, we began to hear in the men's house (not thirty feet from where we stood) a very low murmur, like the muttering of someone reciting his hours. Upon hearing this, the women (about two hundred of them) all stood up and clustered together, listening intently. The men little by little raised their voices and were distinctly heard singing all together and repeating this syllable of exhortation, *He, he, he, he*; the women, to our amazement, answered them from their side, and with a trembling voice; reiterating that same interjection *He, he, he, he*, let out such cries, for more than a quarter of an hour, that as we watched them we were utterly disconcerted. Not only did they howl, but also, leaping violently into the air, they made their breasts shake and they foamed at the mouth—in fact, some, like those who have the falling-sickness over here, fell in a dead faint; I can only believe that the devil entered their body and that they fell into a fit of madness.²¹

For Léry the spectacle is the very embodiment of what his culture views not only as otherness but as evil: the intimations of bestiality and madness merge with an overarching, explanatory image of demonic possession. The

reference to the devil is not a metaphor; it is the deep truth of the natives' condition: 'the Americans are visibly and actually tormented by evil spirits' (p. 138). This torment is deeply significant, for in Léry's view the natives' religious fear and suffering is both a divine punishment—proof that 'even in this world there are devils to torment those who deny God and his power'—and justification for their future damnation: 'one can see that this fear they have of Him whom they refuse to acknowledge will render them utterly without excuse' (p. 139). In the Kafka-like logic of this argument, the Tupinamba will be justly condemned through all eternity precisely because they fear the one true God whom they do not and cannot know and whom for this reason they refuse to acknowledge. Léry reports, as the most vivid example of this refusal, that he and his fellows chose the natives' intense fear of thunder as an opportunity to evangelize: 'Adapting ourselves to their crudeness,' he writes, 'we would seize the occasion to say to them that this was the very God of whom we were speaking, who to show his grandeur and power made heavens and earth tremble; their resolution and response was that since he frightened them in that way, he was good for nothing' (p. 135).

Such a response, in Léry's view, condemns the Tupinamba to fear, credulity, and superstition. It is not an accident that the Protestant Léry thought that the low chanting from the men's house sounded at first 'like the muttering of someone reciting his hours' (p. 141); we have already glimpsed his condemnation of the Catholic Mass as cannibalism.²² For Léry, whose *History of a Voyage* was published in Calvinist Geneva, Catholic rituals are occasions in which the devil is doing his work, and he invites his readers to interpret the Tupinamba ceremony in the light of that Mass: in both the experience of wonder is linked to a violation of all that is most holy.

In the 1585 edition of the *History of a Voyage*, Léry added to his account a description taken from Jean Bodin's *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (1578) of a witches' sabbath. Bodin was one of the most learned, influential, and uncompromisingly punitive of the Renaissance witchmongers, the most articulate of those who insisted that the devil was literally present in what appeared to be fantastic and imaginary claims. Léry evidently felt he had found in Bodin's account the European ritual that most closely resembled the astonishing scene he had witnessed more than twenty years earlier, a resemblance that transcended the immense cultural and geographical distance he himself continually remarks: 'I have concluded,' Léry writes, 'that they have the same master: that is, the Brazilian women and the witches over here were guided by the same spirit of Satan; neither the

distance between the places nor the long passage over the sea keeps the father of lies from working both here and there on those who are handed over to him by the just judgment of God.²³

What Léry has seen in Brazil then is nothing less than the active and literal manifestation of Satan, and like Bodin he insists that those who would take this manifestation as a delusion, imagination, or metaphor are ‘atheist dogs,’ ‘worse than the devils themselves’ (p. 139). And yet it is precisely here, at the moment in which the wonder aroused by the religious assembly is fully disclosed as a justifiable shudder of revulsion, a prelude to flight, that the mood shifts radically:

Although I had been among the savages for more than half a year and was already fairly well used to their ways, nonetheless (to be frank) being somewhat frightened and not knowing how the game might turn out, I wished I were back at our fort. However, after these chaotic noises and howls had ended and the men had taken a short pause (the women and children were now silent), we heard them once again singing and making their voices resound in a harmony so marvelous that you would hardly have needed to ask whether, since I was now somewhat easier in my mind at hearing such sweet and gracious sounds, I wished to watch them from nearby. (p. 141)

Avoidance is transformed into approach, as Léry and his fellows draw nearer to the dancing, singing men:

At the beginning of this witches’ sabbath, when I was in the women’s house, 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 [*tout ravi*]. Whenever I remember it, my heart trembles, and it seems their voices are still in my ears. (pp. 142–4)

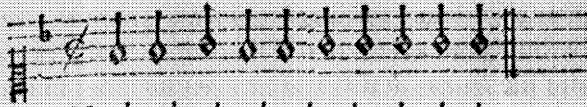
Wonder is now not the sign of revulsion but of rapture, an ecstatic joy that can be experienced anew even twenty years later through an act of remembrance. The authenticity of the recovery is confirmed in Léry’s body itself, in the trembling of his heart, for this trembling is the authentic sign of wonder, proof that the marvelous Tupinamba voices are still in his ears: wonder, as Albertus Magnus wrote, is like ‘a systole of the heart’.²⁴ As Albertus’ brilliant figure and Léry’s experience make clear, the marvelous gestures toward the world by registering an overpowering intensity of response. Someone witnesses something amazing, but what most matters takes place not ‘out there’ or along the receptive surfaces of the body where the self encounters the world, but deep within, at the vital, emotional center of the witness. This inward response cannot be marginalized or

denied, any more than a constriction of the heart in terror can be denied; wonder is absolutely exigent, a primary or radical passion.

But what is the meaning of this passion for Léry? What is the relation between the experience of exquisite beauty and the horror of satanic evil? It would be possible to reconcile the two by reminding the reader, as Renaissance clerics frequently did, that the angel of darkness disguised himself as an angel of light. The beauty of the music would be revealed then to be a lure. But, though he can be an alert and even relentless moralist, Léry does not interpret his experience as a temptation; he seems eager to provide not a warning but a reflection of his own intense pleasure. Thus in later editions of his *History of a Voyage* he even includes musical notation for the Tupinamba chant, as if he longed for his reader actually to hear the music and share his ravishment. Nor does he quite turn this ravishment, as he elsewhere does, into a lesson for atheists, a sign that even the benighted savages have some higher vision, some practice of religious adoration. He does, to be sure, learn from the Norman interpreter that the songs he has just heard mingle laments for the dead and threats against enemies with something else: a tale of a flood in ancient times that had covered the world and drowned everyone except their ancestors who climbed to safety in the highest trees. Not surprisingly, Léry believes that this tale is a corrupt oral version of the biblical Flood—‘being altogether deprived of writing, it is hard for them to retain things in their purity’ (p. 144)—but the scriptural echo is not what gives the chant its power, for it had ravished his senses before he knew its meaning.

Léry presents his appreciation of the beauty of the savage music as a triumph over his own panic fear in the presence of the demonic. Perhaps we should interpret his response then as a version of the aesthetic recoding by means of which medieval Christians neutralized the images of the ancient pagan deities. In Michael Camille’s account of this recoding, ‘the aesthetic anesthetizes’: medieval admiration for the wonders of pagan art, he writes, ‘was really a phenomenon of distancing, a taking out of context.’²⁵ It is certainly true that Léry’s ravishment takes the ceremony—which he has identified as a witches’ sabbath—out of context, but his response does not seem to be the same as distancing: on the contrary, he takes it out of context—any context, including his own beliefs—in order to approach more closely, to draw it into himself, to remember it in the very beating of his heart. The experience of wonder seems to resist recuperation, containment, ideological incorporation; it sits strangely apart from everything that gives coherence to Léry’s universe, apart and yet utterly compelling. This passage in the *History of a Voyage*, Michel de Certeau

peu eurent esleué leurs voix, & que fort distinctement nous les entendîmes chanter tous ensemble, & repeter souuent ceste interiection d'acouragement,



He he he he he he he he he

*Chantée
rie des
Sauuages.*

nous fusmes tous esbahis que les fêmes de leur costé leur respondans & avec vne voix tremblante, reïterans ceste mesme interiection. *He, he, he, he*, se prindrent à crier de telle façon, l'espace de plus d'un quart d'heure, que nous les regardans ne sauions quelle contenance tenir. Et de faict, parce que non seulement elles hurloyent ainsi, mais aussi qu'avec cela sautans en l'air de grande violence faisoient branler leurs mammelles & escumoyent par la bouche, voire aucunes (comme ceux qui ont le haut mal par-deça) tomboyent toutes esuanouïes, ie ne croi pas autrement que le diable ne leur entrast dans le corps, & qu'elles ne deuinssent soudain Demoniaques. Comme aussi on a escrit, qu'Alphonse Roy de Naples, regardant vne femme qui dansoit & sautoit trop des-honrément, dit aux assistans, Attendez vn peu, la Sibylle donnera tantost ses Oracles: pource qu'elle ne rendoit iamais responce, comme on dit, si elle n'estoit surprise de fureur. Tellement qu'ayant leu cela, avec ce que dit Bodin en sa Demonomanie, alleguant Iam-

*Harlemés
& contenance
estrange
des femmes
Sauuages.*

*I. iij. 7.
ch. 3.*

writes, is 'a stolen instant, a purloined memory beyond the text.' The fact that L ry does not securely attach a meaning to his experience—and that we cannot do so for him—is the source of its mysterious power: 'An absence of meaning,' de Certeau remarks, 'opens a rift in time.'²⁶

This rift, this cracking apart of contextual understanding in an elusive and ambiguous experience of wonder, is a central recurring feature in the early discourse of the New World. It is the feature that most decisively links this discourse, stylistically unambitious and conceptually muddled though much of it is, to both philosophical and aesthetic discourse. For wonder plays a decisive role in the period's philosophy and art, theorized by the former as a principal cause and by the latter as a principal effect. That is, philosophy (as Socrates had already formulated it) begins in wonder, while the purpose of poetry (as innumerable poets said) was to produce the marvelous. This theoretical conceptualization of the marvelous was already under way before the discourse of the New World, but it was by no means fully articulated. It is not, in other words, only or even primarily as an intellectual background to Columbus and other early voyagers that I find discussions of the marvelous important. Something like the reverse is also the case: the frequency and intensity of the appeal to wonder in the wake of the great geographical discoveries of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries helped (along with many other factors) to provoke its conceptualization.²⁷

This conceptualization can be read back into the discourse of travel in order to explicate some of its most persistent and puzzling features. According to Descartes—to choose the philosopher who marks the endpoint of the mental world of the early modern voyagers and the inception of a different and more familiar world—wonder is not, as Albertus had thought, registered in the heart and blood; unlike the other passions that have good or evil as their objects and hence involve the heart, wonder has only knowledge as its object and thus occurs strictly in the brain. This relocation would seem to detach wonder from the source of its somatic authority—the experience of something very much like a heart attack—but Descartes too insists on its immense strength, a strength that derives from the element of surprise, 'the sudden and unexpected arrival of this impression.'²⁸ This surprise does not cause the heart to contract, in Descartes's view, but at its most extreme it causes a drastic alteration in the spirits of the brain which rush, as it were, to bear witness to the object of wonder:

And this surprise has so much power in causing the spirits which are in the cavities of the brain to take their way from thence to the place where is the

impression of the object which we wonder at, that it sometimes thrusts them all there, . . . and this causes the whole body to remain as immobile as a statue, and prevents our perceiving more of the object than the first face which is presented, or consequently of acquiring a more particular knowledge of it. This is what we commonly call being astonished, and astonishment is an excess of wonder which can never be otherwise than bad. (pp. 363–4)

A moderate measure of wonder is useful in that it calls attention to that which is 'new or very different from what we formerly knew, or from what we supposed that it ought to be' and fixes it in the memory, but an excess of wonder is harmful, Descartes thought, for it freezes the individual in the face of objects whose moral character, whose capacity to do good or evil, has not yet been determined. That is, wonder precedes, even escapes, moral categories. When we wonder, we do not yet know if we love or hate the object at which we are marveling; we do not know if we should embrace it or flee from it. For this reason wonder, Descartes argues, 'has no opposite and is the first of all the passions.' Similarly for Spinoza—in whose account wonder was not, strictly speaking, a passion at all, but rather a mode of conception (*imaginatio*)—wonder depends upon a suspension or failure of categories and is a kind of paralysis, a stilling of the normal associative restlessness of the mind. In wonder, 'the mind comes to a stand, because the particular concept in question has no connection with other concepts.'²⁹ The object that arouses wonder is so new that for a moment at least it is alone, unsystematized, an utterly detached object of rapt attention.

Wonder—thrilling, potentially dangerous, momentarily immobilizing, charged at once with desire, ignorance, and fear—is the quintessential human response to what Descartes calls a 'first encounter' (p. 358). Such terms, which recur in philosophy from Aristotle through the seventeenth century, made wonder an almost inevitable component of the discourse of discovery, for by definition wonder is an instinctive recognition of difference, the sign of a heightened attention, 'a sudden surprise of the soul,' as Descartes puts it (p. 362), in the face of the new. The expression of wonder stands for all that cannot be understood, that can scarcely be believed. It calls attention to the problem of credibility and at the same time insists upon the undeniability, the exigency of the experience.

It is in this spirit that Milton invokes wonder when he describes the rebel angels shrinking themselves in scale in order to enter the council chamber of Pandemonium:

Behold a wonder! they but now who seemed
In bigness to surpass Earth's giant sons
Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room

Throng numberless, like that pygmean race
 Beyond the Indian mount, or faerie elves,
 Whose midnight revels, by a forest-side
 Or fountain some belated peasant sees,
 Or dreams he sees, while overhead the moon
 Sits arbitress, and nearer to the earth
 Wheels her pale course, they on their mirth and dance
 Intent, with jocund music charm his ear;
 At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds.

(*Paradise Lost* 1.777–88)³⁰

The transformation of the rebel angels is at once unbelievable and true—hence a wonder, akin to the marvelous beings, giants and pygmies, long associated with voyages to the Indies. The experience of beholding such a wonder is, in Milton's account, profoundly ambiguous: the exalted spectacle of radical evil is likened to a belated peasant's hallucinatory encounter with fairies, likened then to moon-struck Bottom who tells his mates, 'I am to discourse wonders; but ask me not what' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* v. ii. 29–30). For a moment epic is confounded with comedy, as are giant with dwarf, torment with mirth, demonic with harmless, what lies outside the mind with what lies within. Magical charms, compelling and dangerous, are fleetingly lodged within the pleasures of art, as the fairies 'charm his ear' with their music. The whole experience produces the somatic effect that is, as we have seen, the hallmark of wonder: 'At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds.'

With this rebounding of the heart we are back to Jean de Léry and the wonder of Tupinamba music and dance. Experiences such as those he wishes to describe pose a serious rhetorical problem, a problem akin to that Milton faced in describing events in Heaven and Hell. At the beginning of his account, Léry asks how his French readers can be made to 'believe what can only be seen two thousand leagues from where they live: things never known (much less written about) by the Ancients; things so marvelous that experience itself can scarcely engrave them upon the understanding even of those who have in fact seen them?' (p. lx). The skepticism that educated Europeans have developed must somehow be suspended; they must be made to revise their sense of what is possible and what is only fabulous.

In Guiana in the 1590s Sir Walter Raleigh hears of a people who 'are reported to have their eyes in their shoulders, and their mouths in the middle of their breasts.' Raleigh knows that this 'may be thought a meere fable,' precisely the kind of report that had given Mandeville—who writes of 'foul men of figure without heads, and they have eyes in either shoulder

one, and their mouths are round shaped like a horseshoe, y-midst their breasts' (p. 142)—a reputation for lying. But for Raleigh it is skepticism rather than credulity that is likely to be misleading: 'Such a nation was written of by Mandevile, whose reports were holden for fables many yeeres, and yet since the East Indies were discovered, we find his relations true of such things as heretofore were held incredible.'³¹ Similarly, Léry writes, with a sarcastic glance at his great enemy Friar Thevet, 'I do not endorse the fabulous tales found in the books of certain people who, trusting to hearsay, have written things that are completely false,' but, he goes on to declare, 'I am not ashamed to confess that since I have been in this land of America, where everything to be seen—the way of life of its inhabitants, the form of the animals, what the earth produces—is so unlike what we have in Europe, Asia, and Africa that it may very well be called a "New World" with respect to us, I have revised the opinion that I formerly had of Pliny and others when they describe foreign lands, because I have seen things as fantastic and prodigious as any of those—once thought incredible—that they mention' (pp. lx–lxi).

The discovery of the New World at once discredits the Ancients who did not know of these lands and, by raising the possibility that what had seemed gross exaggerations and lies were in fact sober accounts of radical otherness, gives classical accounts of prodigies a new life. Léry's text depends for its authority precisely on its claim to sober accuracy ('simply to declare what I have myself experienced, seen, heard, and observed'), on its refusal of the lies, hearsay, and exaggerations of Thevet; but at the same time, he is writing not in testimony to the ordinariness and familiarity of Brazil but to its utter strangeness, the strangeness of 'lands completely unknown to the Ancients' (p. 3). His work can only be believed if he arouses in his readers something of the wonder that he himself has felt, for that wonder will link whatever is out there with inward conviction. For the early voyagers, wonder not only marked the new but mediated between outside and inside (Milton's 'sees|Or dreams he sees'). Hence the ease with which the very words *marvel* and *wonder* shift between the designation of a material object and the designation of a response to the object, between intense, almost phantasmagorical inward states and thoroughly externalized objects that can, after the initial moments of astonishment have passed, be touched, cataloged, inventoried, possessed.

The marvelous is a central feature then in the whole complex system of representation, verbal and visual, philosophical and aesthetic, intellectual and emotional, through which people in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance apprehended, and thence possessed or discarded, the unfamil-

iar, the alien, the terrible, the desirable, and the hateful. By a 'system of representation,' I do not mean to suggest that there was a single, perfectly integrated mimetic practice. In this period, as in many others, philosophy and art are distinct and often opposed—the former seeking to pass through the wonder that the latter seeks to enhance—and each is in turn distinct from discourses like history, theology, natural history, and law. Each of the discursive regimes has its own characteristic concerns, intellectual and procedural boundaries, specialized languages. But each of these also touches and interacts with the others in a loose but powerful association, an association driven by certain mimetic assumptions, shared metaphors, operational practices, root perceptions.

Interpreters of literature are trained to analyze the imagination at play; in most early European accounts of the New World we are dealing instead with the imagination at work. It would be foolish to conflate the two modes and to proceed as if interpretive practice could be the same with both; I am painfully aware of all of the ways in which a literary critic is ill-equipped to deal with a text such as Columbus's letter to Santangel. But the European encounter with the New World, with its radical displacement of routines, brought close to the surface of non-literary texts imaginative operations that are normally buried deep below their surface (unlike works of literature where these operations are prominently displayed). Consequently, it may be possible to use some of the concerns of literary criticism to illuminate texts written with anything but literary ambitions and actions performed with anything but theatrical intentions—texts and actions that register not the pleasures of the fictive but the compelling powers of the real.

Let me try to be clear: I am not identifying an overarching Renaissance ideology, a single way of making and remaking the world. Any of the individual national cultures of early modern Europe, let alone the fantastically complex whole, had so many different and conflicting ways of seeing and describing the world that any attempt to posit a unified perceptual field will prove a gross distortion. But the variety is not infinite, and in the face of the New World—the epitome of Descartes's 'sudden and unexpected arrival'—the differing responses disclose shared assumptions and techniques. Struggling to grasp hold of the immense realms newly encountered, Europeans deployed a lumbering, jerry-built, but immensely powerful mimetic machinery, the inescapable mediating agent not only of possession but of simple contact with the other. For this reason, the early modern discourse of discovery, as I shall try to show, is a superbly powerful register of the characteristic claims and limits of European representational practice.

The qualities that gave wonder its centrality to this practice also gave it its ideological malleability. For the perception in Descartes or Spinoza that wonder precedes recognitions of good and evil, like the perception in Aristotle or Albertus Magnus that it precedes knowledge, conferred upon the marvelous a striking indeterminacy and made it—like the imagination to which it is closely linked—the object of a range of sharply differing uses. The chapters that follow explore two of these uses. With Mandeville, I argue in Chapter 2, the language of the marvelous is part of a renunciation of possession, the critical pathway in a circulation of plagiarized, unstable signifiers through which a crusading drive toward the sacred rocks at the center of the world is transformed into a tolerant perambulation along its rim. With Columbus, by contrast, the language of the marvelous is subtly revised, enabling it, as I show in Chapter 3, to function strategically as a redemptive, aestheticizing supplement to a deeply flawed legal ritual of appropriation. I do not think that this possessive use of the marvelous is decisive or final: as I try to show in the latter part of the book, the experience of wonder continually reminds us that our grasp of the world is incomplete.

The most palpable sign of this incompleteness for the early voyagers was an inability to understand or be understood. Such language difference perhaps always has some element of the marvelous. (A Tuscan farmer once told me he could not quite get past his astonishment that *pane* was not called *pane* in English; all other words might possibly differ, but *pane*?) Europeans were particularly struck by encountering peoples who spoke languages, as one observer put it, ‘neither known nor understood of any.’ This linguistic encounter, I show, was caught up in the larger possessive project on which Europeans had embarked. Chapter 4 turns from the legal rites of possession discussed in the preceding chapter to the ruthless appropriation of language. Kidnapping, of course, was not the only possible response to linguistic difference. Trade, based on a more mutual exchange of words and gestures along with objects, offers some limited relief from the relentless, one-way pressure of linguistic appropriation, but I note that trade in the early discourse of the New World always seems to slide toward the oppressiveness and inequality of colonial relations. Hence I end the chapter with the emblematic fate of an Eskimo kidnapped in the act of trading and caught up as a wonder in the European representational machinery.

The trajectory these chapters follow then is from medieval wonder as a sign of dispossession to Renaissance wonder as an agent of appropriation: the early discourse of the New World is, among other things, a record of the

colonizing of the marvelous. But my book emphatically does not end here, for an historical trajectory is not a theoretical necessity. In my final chapter, I return to the marvelous as a sign of the eyewitness's surprising recognition of the other in himself, himself in the other. I start with Herodotus, for whom such wonderful recognition is the very condition of history. I then look for a comparable acknowledgment of the other in Bernal Díaz's eyewitness account of Cortés's conquest of Mexico and try to understand why it does not break through. In Bernal Díaz wonder is, in effect, at war with itself: on the one hand, it provokes an uneasy perception of the similitudes hidden in otherness, on the other hand it becomes a blocking agent that continually prevents the perception of the other as brother. Finally, I find in Montaigne a sophisticated version of the mobile, unsettling, tolerant wonder that characterized *Mandeville's Travels*. This recovery of the critical and humanizing power of the marvelous does not magically make up for its use in the discourse of those who came to the New World to possess and enslave—as if art could redeem the nightmares of history—but it does suggest that wonder remains available for decency as well as domination.

I want to return to what I witnessed, or dreamed that I witnessed, in Bali: a sense at once of plenitude and ease, as if everything were possible, as if the festive crowd were freely choosing its pleasures and remaining unconstrained by the choice, as if one's culture were more securely one's own by virtue of a refusal of possession, as if wonder could be prolonged into the ebb and flow of delight. If this eyewitness testimony is suspect, my readers can perhaps agree that what I claim to have seen is a displaced and exotic and idealized image of the cultural mobility of late twentieth-century Europe and America. The displacement enables us to recover the wonder that is latent in our own practices, a wonder that has become flattened by familiarity and yoked depressingly to the ordinary, half-visible regulation of class and status in which museums, movies, paperback books, and schools all play a part. This is the utopian moment of travel: when you realize that what seems most unattainably marvelous, most desirable, is what you almost already have, what you could have—if you could only strip away the banality and corruption of the everyday—at home.