

Cosmopolitan Empires

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Jonathan Hart. *Representing the New World: The English and French Uses of the Example of Spain* (New York: Palgrave, 2001. 351 pp. \$69.95); *Columbus, Shakespeare, and the Interpretation of the New World* (New York: Palgrave, 2003. 231 pp. \$65.00); *Comparing Empires: European Colonialism from Portuguese Expansion to the Spanish-American War* (New York: Palgrave, 2003. 192 pp. \$59.95).

PERHAPS NO FIELD OF INQUIRY in the humanities has seen as much crossing of old disciplinary boundaries in recent years as have early modern studies. Thus, there has been an increasing tendency on the part of scholars of the (English) Renaissance to look outward and (mainly) westward across the Atlantic;¹ of early Americanists (traditionally beholden to their tasks of explaining the “colonial” origins of a later “American” literature) to look eastward, toward the “Atlantic” imperial culture of which

1 For only a few recent examples of Renaissance scholars engaging with issues of empire and colonialism, see Greenblatt, Hulme; R. Greene; and Hulme and Sherman.

ESC 32.4 (December 2006): 213–224

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they were a part;² of scholars in “English” (whether their expertise be in American or British literature, in the Renaissance, or the eighteenth century) to read texts traditionally claimed by other modern languages, such as “Spanish” or “French”; and, vice versa, of scholars of Romance languages to take account of developments in English studies.³

Much of this recent breakdown of old disciplinary borders has been due to a renewed interest in the issue of “empire”—an interest that has gained fresh currency in an age when decolonization, transnational migration, and multinational capitalism are steadily challenging the political and demographic underpinning of the modern nation states. Thus, scholars have increasingly exposed the inadequacy of nationalist literary histories for an understanding of the early modern period by illustrating the imperial background in the formation of early modern nation states and the cosmopolitan dynastic connections of many of the key literary and political figures of a period that was still pervasively polyglot. The discovery and conquest of America, in particular, was a thoroughly “trans-” (or, more accurately “pre-”) national and trans-linguistic process, often involving Italian explorers who had moved west and, though frequently only in tenuous command of the languages there, offered their services and expertise at the courts of Spain, England, and Portugal; German financiers and printers, many of them—like the Crombergs—living in Spain; courtly aristocrats and dynasts, such as the Spanish Habsburgs with close ties to the English House of Tudor; English adventurers, such as Sir Francis Drake or Sir Walter Raleigh, intimately familiar with the Spanish language and even friendly with noblemen in Spain; and poets such as Sir Philip Sidney, who was a cousin not only of the Spanish poets Diego Hurtado de Mendoza and Garcilaso de la Vega but also of the Peruvian mestizo historian Garcilaso de la Vega, *el Inca*. As one literary historian has recently put it, the early modern literary world was a “transatlantic family” (R. Greene 226).

In the cosmopolitan and trans- (or pre-) national world of European expansionism in the Americas, Spain and Portugal presented late-coming nations aspiring to empire, such as that of France and England (as well as, later, the United States), with an example that was foundational albeit “ambivalent and contradictory”: on the one hand, Englishmen and

2 For some “Atlantic” approaches to early American literature, see Spengemann, *Mirror*; Shields; Armstrong and Tennenhouse; and Gura. These accounts of early American literature are built on the work of historians of the early Americas who have called for a wider, Atlantic perspective on early American cultures; for only a few examples, see J. Greene and Pole; and Greene, *Peripheries*.

3 For only one example of recent crossovers between English and Spanish Renaissance studies, see Fuchs.

Frenchmen aimed to emulate the Iberian example in the New World; on the other, they tried to supplant the Iberian ascendancy in the Americas by defining themselves against it. This is the recurrent theme of Jonathan Hart's recent trilogy on European expansionism and colonialism, a series of books, all published by Palgrave in the course of only three years, that represent an impressive feat in scholarly productivity.

The first (and best) volume in this series, *Representing the New World*, is intended as an "essay in the historiography of expansionism" that means to "show the rhetorical complexity" of the texts in this historiographic archive and to "demonstrate the significance of translations in both disseminating and shaping knowledge surrounding the colonization of the New World" (1, 7). It begins with a survey of some of the well-known issues surrounding the European discovery of America, such as Pope Alexander VI's division of the New World between Spain and Portugal, the French and English challenges to the authority of the papal donation, the Spanish debate surrounding the "justness" of the conquest, and the rise of the so-called "Black Legend"—the notion that the Iberian conquest of the Americas was unjust and exceedingly cruel. Hart's interest in this book lies primarily in the question of how these issues found their translations in English and French texts. Proceeding chronologically in five chapters (1492–1547, 1548–1566, 1567–1588, 1589–1642, and 1643–1713) as well as in an introduction and a conclusion, the book takes the reader from the first European encounter with the Americas to the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), which concluded the War of the Spanish Succession. Hart hereby stresses the role that cosmopolitan Italians and the Vatican played in the early phases, as Italian explorers such as the Cabots, Vespucci, and Verrazano each solicited support from the various western courts of Spain, France, and England. As Hart shows in Chapter 3, Spain's example was initially received quite favourably during the first half of the sixteenth century in England, as translators such as Richard Eden working under the reign of Mary (who was married to Philip II) called on Englishmen to imitate the Spanish example. However, this initially positive reception gradually came to be counterbalanced by the emergence of the Black Legend—especially, as Hart shows in Chapter 4, after the ascension of Elizabeth to the throne and the insipient English challenge to Spain's monopoly in the New World emerging with voyages undertaken by English adventurers such as Walter Raleigh and in writings by propagandists such as Richard Hakluyt. Chapter 5 discusses the documents relating to the first permanent English settlements in Virginia, such as William Strachey's *A True Repertory* and John Smith's accounts, as well as the travel collections published by Samuel

Purchas. Chapter 6, finally, treats the documents relating to English and French encroachments into territories occupied or claimed by Spain, such as Oliver Cromwell's Western Design and the French expansion into the Mississippi territory.

The second volume, *Columbus, Shakespeare, and the Interpretation of the New World* means to argue that "textual origins and transmissions" of European discourses about the New World "are problematic and in turn make interpretation refractory" (3–4). After the introductory first chapter, Chapter 2 provides a discussion of some of the textual issues—already familiar since Margarita Zamora's exhaustive studies (see Zamora)—surrounding the surviving copy of Columbus's journal (which is a paraphrase by Bartolomé de Las Casas) and his letters, as well as certain "contradictions" (22) across these texts. Chapter 3 chronicles the legacy of Columbus in texts dating from the sixteenth century to the late nineteenth and concludes that the image of Columbus in Western culture is historically "ambivalent" (78). Chapter 4, entitled "Sexing America," discusses the "gendering of America in erotic terms," hereby synthesizing insights familiar from feminist scholarship by Annette Kolodny, Carolyn Merchant, and others in focusing on recurrent tropes in the European historiography about America, such as Amazons, sodomy, polygamy, and so on (9; see also Kolodny; also Merchant). Chapter 5 discusses what Hart calls cultural "go-betweens"—captives, renegades, and translators such as La Malinche and Jerónimo de Aguilar in the conquest of Mexico or Squanto in the Pilgrims dealings with the New England Indians—in order to suggest that the contact between Europeans and Native Americans was "not as one-sided as many might now think" (105). Chapter 6 discusses Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, seeking to "find a version of *The Tempest* that acknowledges the political and aesthetic dimension of the play but that discovers a middle ground between them" (130) and to show "the ambivalence, contradiction and messiness of *The Tempest* in the context of other works" (144). Chapter 7, finally, means to establish a dialogue with postcolonial criticism about Columbus and Shakespeare by revealing "what cultural appropriation is and its role in imperialism, colonialism and postcolonialism" (149).

The third volume, *Comparing Empires*, approaches the issues of early modern European imperialism in a more explicitly comparative fashion. It hereby heavily leans on the work of historians such as Anthony Pagden and John Russell-Wood but attempts to go beyond these recent accounts by taking the debate forward to an emerging U.S. imperialism during the nineteenth century up to the Spanish-American War. The introductory first chapter reviews some of the virtues of comparative thinking, as well

as some historical resistance to it in modern disciplines, such as the social and political sciences, as well as cultural anthropology. Chapter 2 places more emphasis on Portuguese expansionism in America, Africa, and India than the earlier two volumes had done by discussing the expeditions of Pedro Alvares de Cabral, which were chronicled by Pedro Vaz de Caminha, while juxtaposing the Portuguese experience in South America with that of the French, as chronicled by French Calvinist Jean de Lery, and that of the Dutch. Chapter 3 revisits the question of the reception of the Iberian example of conquest in the Franco- and Anglophone empires and the issue of the Black Legend, though now bringing in different materials such as William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*. The fourth and final chapter takes the discussion forward to the eighteenth century in considerations of writings by Diderot, the abbe Raynal, Marmontel, and others and ends with a discussion of the demise of the Ibero-European empires in the New World with the Spanish-American War and the emergence of what Hart calls "the great nation and economic empire today, here and now ... the United States" (*Comparing* 110). The book concludes on an almost providentialist note that oddly appears to echo the idea of *translatio imperii*, so pervasive in many of the texts discussed in these books, when stating that "The translation of empire was never entirely predictable—being able to tell which party would fall and which would rise—but the translation itself, at least thus far, is something that was sure to happen" (*Comparing* 141).

In their transnational orientation, Professor Hart's three books together arrive as timely and welcome contributions to a growing body of comparative scholarship by both Renaissance scholars and early Americanists. As Kenneth Mills rightly points out in his blurb on the jacket of *Columbus*, the most valuable aspect of Professor Hart's recent works on European colonialism is to strike another "blow against insular treatments of this or that early modern European mindset and imperial approach." Moreover, these three books provide useful descriptions of primary texts and are impressive in their command of vast archives. Finally, they are possibly of interest as reflections on the state of the recent critical discourse surrounding the European encounter with the New World. The first volume, *Representing*, in particular, is valuable in its very ambitious scope. So far, we have seen comparative treatments of Ibero- and Anglo- literatures on the one hand as well as Franco- and Anglophone literatures on the other, but only few have attempted a comprehensive account of the literature of expansionism in all these languages.⁴ The advantage of Hart's comprehensive approach

4 Literary historians have only recently begun to address the literature of expansionism in explicitly comparative terms. Thus, Stephen Greenblatt has

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is that it allows us to see connections that may otherwise be missed in accounts with a more limited scope. For example, while earlier students of the rise of the Black Legend, such as Charles Gibson and Bernadette Bucher, have stressed the role that Las Casas's indictments of Spanish cruelties toward Native Americans played (see Gibson; also Bucher), Hart brings to light what might be called the "French connection" in the rise of the Black Legend when discussing the Protestant reactions to Menéndez de Avilés's massacre of Ribault's French Huguenot colony in Florida during the 1560s. This is an overall convincing point, even if there are occasional oversimplifications in Hart's account with regard to the political context surrounding the rise of the Black Legend in imperial Spain, such as the division of Spanish historiography into "anti-Indian" versus "pro-Indian" works (i.e., Gómara versus Las Casas) (103–12).⁵

Beyond this point, however, and the comprehensiveness of these volumes in approach and archive notwithstanding, it is somewhat difficult to pinpoint what in particular is to be learned from them about the history or literature of European expansionism that we haven't already known from the more focused works of Max Savelle, Anthony Pagden, Jack Greene, Charles Gibson, Antonello Gerbi, Claudio Véliz, Patricia Seed, Peter Hulme, Stephen Greenblatt, Djelal Kadir, and others who have discussed the European encounter with and experience in the New World comparatively. Generally, the reader may note a lack of critical context

investigated how the discourse of "wonder" rationalized colonial appropriation; Gordon Sayre was interested in the similarities and differences between English and French colonial representations of Native Americans; Djelal Kadir has compared the rhetoric of providentialism in Spanish and New English texts; Roland Greene has addressed the Anglo-Ibero (both Spanish and Portuguese) connections in European discourse about the New World generally and the Petrarchan discourse of unrequited love in particular; I also discuss some of the hemispheric and transatlantic ties with regard to the evolution of early modern science and generic evolutions in colonial American literatures (see Sayre; Greene; Bauer). Historians, by contrast, have a longer and more extensive (albeit often contested) tradition of comparative scholarship on European imperialism in the new world. See, for example, Bolton; Hanke; Zavala; Savelle; Véliz; Seed; Jack Greene; Pagden, *Lords*; and Langley.

- 5 Thus, as Lewis Hanke, Tzvetan Todorov, Rolena Adorno, José Rabasa, and others have pointed out, it is an oversimplification to see Las Casas's pacifistic discourse as what Hart calls "an opposition from within to stand up for 'them,' the tradition of the other from within" (112). As these critics have pointed out, this "opposition from within" had in fact become official state policy (see Todorov; Adorno; and Rabasa). David Brading has further argued that the debate surrounding the rights of the American Indian in reality revolved around the question of who would be entitled to the spoils of the conquest and, thus, the larger question of the nature of a colonial empire.

and argumentative focus in these three books—apart from some general (though not always original) ideas such as that the English and French responses to the Iberian example were “ambivalent and contradictory” (*Representing* 7) or that “Historical context should connect ‘postcolonialism’ with ‘colonialism’” (*Columbus* 5). Ultimately, the level of generality of the ideas presented here raises the question of who the intended audience is for these volumes. Being a professor of English and Comparative Literature (rather than History), Hart states that his method throughout his trilogy is to read the texts of European expansionism “in context” and to provide what he calls an “*explication de texte*” (*Columbus* 144). In actuality, however, the readings of texts in these three books can more accurately be described as plot summaries that provide only scant historical or cultural contexts. Instead, the summaries are frequently interspersed by or conclude with somewhat disjointed commentaries that as readily obscure as illuminate the arguments at stake.

To be sure, the lack of focused arguments and clear critical contexts does not mean that the general descriptions and summaries provided by these books cannot still be useful for a general reader who may not be familiar with texts read only infrequently in literature courses (such as early modern travel histories). But even general readers may wonder what can be learned from a scene-by-scene plot summary of *The Tempest* (*Columbus* 132–44) that they didn’t know before from having read such a well-known work for themselves. Finally, a general reader is likely to be frustrated by constant references to visual representations that are absent from the book—in fact, apart from the jacket, there is not a single illustration in any of these volumes.

If, on the other hand, these books are intended for an academic audience of historians or literary historians, especially the second and third volume would have benefited from more clarity on the historiographic or critical issues that are at stake in their discussions, on the originality of their arguments and readings, on the historical or critical framework underlying their analyses, and on the intellectual rationale for including and ordering their materials. This is particularly true of *Columbus*, whose stated aim is “to place canonical figures like Columbus and Shakespeare, who hold central places in European if not global culture, in context, both in relation to each other but also in connection with other figures, some well known and others not” (4). What that context is, however, is not made explicit. From subsequent chapters, it appears that this book is yet another attempt to link the two in the history of European colonialism, as has been done in many accounts published in the wake of New Historicist

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and postcolonial criticism.⁶ While it appears from the impressively documented apparatus of notes that Professor Hart is familiar with most of these debates, what he means to add to the conversation remains unclear. As a result, the reader may wonder at the lengthy treatment of the legacy of Columbus up to the nineteenth century that seems unrelated to the question of colonial encounters addressed in the other chapters. Indeed, it seems unsatisfactory to argue that the cultural image of Columbus has changed over time—and therefore is culturally “ambivalent”—without a detailed analysis of what these changes have to teach us about the time period under consideration. From this point of view, the rationale for yoking together Columbus and Shakespeare based on the notion that they are “canonical figures ... who hold central places in European culture” is not entirely convincing without an interrogation of the ideologies that made them so (4).

Apart from a general reticence to advance ideas about archives, to place these ideas into a critical context, and to organize them in an effective manner, another frustrating aspect of this trilogy is a general repetitiveness that is notable within each of and across the three volumes but again most pronounced in *Columbus*, where entire sections stretching over several paragraphs of Chapters 1 and 2 reappear verbatim in Chapter 5 (compare 9 and 106; 16–17 and 107–08; 22 and 109). It is possible that this is merely the result of editorial oversights. If so, it would also explain the abundance of syntactical, grammatical, and typographic problems throughout these volumes.

These caveats notwithstanding, Professor Hart's trilogy demonstrates an impressive knowledge of the vast multinational archives of early modern European expansionism. His comparative, transnational approach to the subject of early modern European expansionism is most appropriate and timely. The first book in his trilogy, *Representing the New World*, has hereby more interesting contributions to offer to the current scholarly

6 Thus, Albert Memmi has taken the characters from Shakespeare's play in his classic investigation of the psychology of colonialism; Americanists such as Eric Cheyfitz have seen *The Tempest* as Shakespeare's “American play,” drawing attention to the role that eloquence and rhetoric played in the history of colonialism; even Latin American critics have connected *The Tempest* to the history of European imperialism and colonialism—and as such, implicitly, to Columbus; see, for example, José Enrique Rodó's famous 1901 essay *Ariel*, in which he compared the “Calibanesque” culture of the United States with the “Arielesque” spirit of Latin American and Romance culture, to José Fernández de Retamar's essay *Caliban* and Aimé Césaire's rewriting of Shakespeare's play as *Une tempête*.

debate about wider, transnational perspectives on the early modern period than do the later two books. It remains to be hoped that Professor Hart's truly admirable knowledge of a vast archive of primary materials will be further shaped and refined in his subsequent contributions to the field.

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