

**Francisco J. Borge 2007: *A New World for a New Nation: The Promotion of America in Early Modern England*. Bern: Peter Lang. 234 pp + 4 plates. ISSN 1661-4720. ISBN 978-3-03911-070-4**

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Until the 1980s, the countless reports, logs, narratives, letters, classical odes, directions to travellers, instructions for colonists, guidebooks, sermons and autobiographical pot-boilers produced by mariners and merchants, adventurers and ambassadors, gentlemen rakes down on their luck, Puritans seeking the promised land, aristocrats seeking fool's gold, paid hacks, penniless humanists, disgruntled settlers, tavern bores and oddballs with itchy feet between, say, 1500 and 1650 were textual regions that barely existed on the map of the literary canon and remained largely untrodden except by colonial or maritime historians and amateur antiquarians. But since the 1980s, “[s]tudies of travel writing, colonialism, and post-colonialism have moved from a virtually invisible periphery to the very centre of the humanities” (Hadfield 2001: ix). This sea change is due to a combination of factors: the postmodern expansion of the academic discipline of English Literature into Cultural Studies; the prevailing reverence for the politics of difference; the happy – in some ways inevitable – marriage between travel writing and postcolonial theory; and, as far as travel writing of the New World is concerned, the kick-start provided by the American Bicentenary of 1976 and the availability of a sound historical bedrock thanks to the sterling editorial and historiographical labours of a group of scholars during the 1950s, 60s and 70s, chief among them David Beers Quinn, generously cited in the book under review. Among the welter of scholarship, perhaps the two works which have most shaped the dominant theoretical approaches to early modern travel writing are Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and Stephen Greenblatt’s essay ‘Invisible Bullets’ (1989). The former argued famously that Western thought and writing from the late eighteenth-century has been constructed upon and over the ideologically driven postulation of the existentially spurious barbarism of the East. *Orientalism*’s insights into the ways cultures perceive each other and define themselves in terms of perceived otherness and difference, and the theoretical development of those insights in Tzvetan Todorov’s *The Conquest of America* (1984) and Michel de Certeau’s *Heterologies* (1986), have fuelled countless studies of travel writing (whether of the Orient, the Old World or the New) that have followed in its wake. At the same time, its implication that writing about the other is in fact writing about the self fits in nicely with the self-reflexivity of travel writing that, largely since Greenblatt, has been endlessly revealed by new historicist and cultural materialist readers of the literature who, as much as, if not more than, for what it might tell us about new worlds, read it as a barometer of the social and political pressures present in the old world.

Francisco J. Borge's monograph is an instance of this fusion, arguing *grosso modo* that early modern writing promoting the New World defined an identity for an emergent Protestant and imperial England posited on its difference from European colonial rivals (principally Spain) and, to a lesser extent, Native Americans and Irish. In addition to presenting prospective investors and colonists with representations of a desirable, easily available America and to convincing them of what Borge calls "their inescapable destiny: becoming an empire" (10), early modern literature promoting the New World "gave shape to a new national self on which a new English identity could be constructed" (17). There is nothing particularly new in any of this: forerunners of Borge in this regard include Richard Helgerson (1992) and Thomas Scanlan (1999), both of whom he cites, as well as Andrew Hadfield (1998), Bruce McLeod (1999) and Joan Pong Linton (1998). Meanwhile, Borge's chosen category of writing, *promotion* or *promotional literature*, was first described by Howard Mumford Jones (1952: 15), as Borge himself acknowledges (45). What is new is Borge's attempt to systematically apply to his chosen corpus of literature Hayden White's conception of the way discourse constitutes the very objects it purports to represent objectively. This is the centrepiece of Borge's book: occurring as it does in Chapter Four, an appraisal of its strengths and weaknesses shall be postponed while some consideration is given to the preceding chapters.

Chapters One ('The American Enterprise') and Two ('Richard Hakluyt and His Contemporaries: The Forerunners of England's Colonization of North America') deal respectively with the "historical and literary contexts in which the nascent English nation was constructed in relation to the New World" (12) and with "the names behind the literature" (13). Material which in another book might have been introductory here expands to fill a good half of Borge's work. This is no criticism of the material itself, which provides a useful and lucid account of England's mainly half-hearted or half-baked trans-Atlantic expeditions from 1485 to the 1620s, of the people who took part in or sponsored those expeditions, and of the principal texts that were written about them. Newcomers to the field will find these first two chapters a useful first port of call for getting their historical and bibliographical bearings. Above all, these chapters drive home the essential point that the success of England's colonial or imperial enterprises was in inverse proportion to the welter of words printed to promote or celebrate them: as Borge writes, "Propaganda thus became the perfect substitute for material profit when trying to engage Englishmen in the American Enterprise [sic]" (45). As so often, written artefacts accomplish the prosthetic goal of repairing or enhancing a defective or deficient reality. More importantly for Borge's purposes, the dearth of enticing or profitable *res* increased the onus on his writers to convince their readers and therefore to make maximal use of the rhetorical arts of persuasion.

If one were to find fault with these chapters, it would be on two counts. Firstly, in Borge's admirable efforts to synthesise events, biographies and texts spanning the best part of a century and a half, many interesting topics are raised only to be left tantalisingly undeveloped. The discussion, for instance, of Raleigh's discursive construction of a desirable moral identity for potential English colonists (104-05) could usefully have been expanded, especially as one of Borge's conclusions is that the New

World was represented as a locus for the moral, spiritual and political regeneration of the English, which would “make them[selves] fit” the for “new” and “renewed” England (213). In this connection, an obvious comparison with Raleigh would be Thomas Hariot: his vigorous recrimination (which Borge [125] quotes later in another connection) of the sluggards and rakes who variously hampered or slandered the expedition to Roanoke is an indirect expression of the virtues of a muscular, protestant ethic of hard work and self-denial, as is William Crashawe’s vehement repudiation of “the calumnies and slanders, raised upon our Colonies ... set abroad by idle and base companions” (also quoted later [125-26]). The second ground for criticism is paradoxically the consequence of one of Borge’s strengths: so comprehensive is his reading of the primary sources and so generous his quotations from them that secondary sources are often squeezed out. In connection with Raleigh, once more, the fascinating question of what exactly his representation of Guyana shows the reader has exercised the minds of many scholars, not least among them Mary C. Campbell, Greenblatt, Louis Montrose (all cited elsewhere by Borge, but not in relation to Raleigh) and Neil L. Whitehead (1997), whose important edition of *The Discoverie* is nowhere mentioned.

After the synthesis of the first two chapters, Chapters Three and Four turn to analysis. Chapter Three (‘Authority, Style, and Self-promotion: Formal and Thematic Aspects of the New World Promotion Literature’) is concerned with “the authorial grounding of narratives” (14) and analyses how promotional writers tackled the question of authority by emphasising the experiential basis of their accounts and by drawing their readers’ attention to the plain style of their writing (the rhetorical plain style being the conventional medium for factual, or purportedly factual, narrative). Borge also makes the secondary point that in addition to promoting the New World, most of his authors were attempting to promote themselves through their writing. In this regard, he offers some interesting comments (130-32) on the way many of his writers exploited the semantic ambiguity of the word *travail* in order to garner admiration for their strenuous exertions, even if in the case of Haklyut the travelling was chiefly of the armchair variety.

As remarked above, Chapter Four (‘The Rhetorics of Nation Building’) is the centrepiece of Borge’s work, advancing as it does his argument that his chosen body of literature obeys Hayden White’s tropological theory of discourse, as proposed in *Metahistory* (1973) and *Tropics of Discourse* (1978). As Borge puts it:

From a naïve metaphorical apprehension of the new reality encountered and its surroundings, the authors of these promotional writings move towards a metonymic and synecdochic characterization of this reality, and then end up having to come to terms with the inadequacy of their enterprise [in White’s ironic phase] – they are forced to search for justification, legitimacy, and authority. (139)

Borge therefore subscribes to the view according to which, as he himself baldly states it, “the main task of discourse, then, is one of *domestication*” (138; Borge’s emphasis), a task fuelled by the same ambition to contain and control the other which characterises processes of colonisation and imperialism. Predictably enough, this

alleged affinity between discourse and colonialism was picked up long ago by ideological critics who posited the existence of a symbiotic relationship between the two, which Greenblatt converted into the dictum that “discourses of colonialism actually do much of the crucially important work of colonialism” (1993: xvi). A lot of water has passed under the bridge since White’s and Greenblatt’s heydays. With respect to metaphor, Philip Fisher (1998), among others, has convincingly argued that metaphorical cognition and its discursive transcription is not a one-way process, whereby a dominant subject may, through familiarisation, draw the sting of the strange; rather, it is a two-way process in which the familiar, after being brought into contact with the strange through analogy, may itself become estranged. Likewise, with respect to colonialism and imperialism, the static, one-way scheme advanced by Edward Said has been questioned by scholars such as James G. Carrier (1995), who has shown how East is just as adept as West at devising discursive straitjackets for the other, Richmond Barbour (2003) and Gerald MacLean (2005), as well as by post-colonial critics such as Homi K. Bhaba (1994), for whom, as for most anthropologists, cultures mutually interact and effect changes on each other in a two-way dynamic. Early modern fears of the risk of transculturation after passing through what Mary Louise Pratt (1992: 6) has termed “the contact zone” (an anxiety Borge mentions in passing in relation to the Irish [175]) are evidence of the symbiotic and mutualistic relationship between coloniser and colonised, and between their respective constructions of the other’s culture (Whitehead 1997: 38). Raleigh’s tobacco-smoking raised eyebrows in high places not for its harmful effects on his health, but for its erosion of a stable cultural identity.

After an introductory section, Chapter Four is divided into three main sections. The first deals with White’s metaphorical mode and identifies a series of tropes through which the otherness of the New World might be represented. After a discussion of the Paradise trope (more, perhaps, of an allegory than a ‘metaphor’ [144]) and the related topics of abundance and gold, Borge turns next to the “process by which the new lands [. . .] were named” (151) – hardly a metaphorical process; then to what he refers to variously as the “conversion motif” or “argument” (155); then to the “metaphor of an English Empire” (157) (which, if it is a metaphor at all, has little to do with apprehending otherness); and finally to “another argument [. . .]: the *providentialist* metaphor” (160; Borge’s emphasis). Now in rhetoric, an argument is not a metaphor, nor are most of the items in his list of tropes. Borge’s shaky terminology is probably due to his over-insistence on applying White’s tropological theory of discourse, one sorry consequence of which is that a lot of interesting and useful material is shoe-horned into a scheme which it at times flatly contradicts. The same is true of the second main section dealing with White’s metonymic and synecdochic modes. After two brief examples of metonymy (166), Borge discusses hyberbole (166-67) – a trope, certainly, but neither metonymic nor synecdochal; “reasoning by inference” (167-70) – the backbone of rhetorical argumentation, but argumentation is part of invention, whereas the tropes belong to elocution; and “the feminization of America” (170-72) – more germane perhaps to the metaphorical mode. He then moves on to a lengthy discussion of “the discursive approach towards the natives” (172-90) which rather abandons the

disciplinarian application of tropological schemes. The final section restores us to White's ironic mode, but withdraws us from a contemplation of American otherness to a survey of anti-Spanish sentiment, the Spaniard and Spain (and to a lesser extent the Irish and Ireland) being the effective others against which the Englishman could devise a new identity for himself and his nation. Once more, the material is interesting, at times stimulating; but while it is consistent with the self-reflexive turn in recent studies of travel literature, by shifting the focus of attention from the Native American other to the more familiar Spanish and Irish foes, Borge's application of White's tropology finally comes to nothing. The goal-posts have been changed two-thirds of the way through the match, so the final result is invalid.

This is a pity. One cannot help feeling that most of the book's theoretical and ideological moorings could quite safely have been slipped, and that Borge's expository clarity and evident command of the primary sources would have been sufficient to let his material speak for itself and, with a little re-organisation, shape itself into a very serviceable and accessible companion to English proto-colonial writing. As it stands, the first two chapters may be recommended on the grounds stated earlier, while the final two whet the appetite for a deeper analysis of many of the thought-provoking issues that Borge raises but, due to the exigencies of his chosen mission, has little time to explore. Of those issues, perhaps the most attractive is the suggestion that America was figured as a territory which would "redeem" corrupt Englishmen, thus making them fit subjects for the new nation of England (210). As Borge admits, "this is a subject for a different book". One hopes work on it is already in progress.

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