

The Discourse of Cannibalism in European Travel Writings in the 16th and 17th Century

Tetsuya MOTOHASHI

Introduction

Instead of discovering the subjectivity of the native people, the Europeans invented the 'Indians', thus initiating the history of the American continent as 'the promised land'. In fact, it was a succession of atrocities of genocide, displacement and destruction. This essay is an attempt to examine the surcharged cultural signification of the 'Canibal', in which the act of disavowal of fantasized others involves an ambivalent practice of affirmation and denial. It will analyze the evolution from an initial dialogism inherent in the term, invented by Columbus in 1492, into a colonizing dynamic which tried to justify the oppression and extermination of native populations at the hands of particularly the Spanish and the English colonizers. These investigations of cannibal discourse in selected travel records and political tracts by European writers in the 16th and 17th century will also critically reveals division within the very desire to control by imputing to the other its own instinctual forces.

1. Discovery and Invention: Columbus Meeting Aliens

On August 18th, 1492, exactly 15 days after Columbus had departed the port of Palos for the 'golden island of Cipangu', *Gramatica Castellana* by Antonio de Nebrija was published in Salamanca. In his introduction dedicated to the Queen Isabella of Castile, Nebrija wrote:

My Illustrious Queen. Whenever I ponder over the tokens of the past that have been preserved in writing, I am forced to the very same conclusion. Language has always

been the consort of empire, and forever shall remain its mate. Together they come into being, together they grow and flower, and together they decline¹⁾.

According to Nebrija, the national language is a perfect instrument of conquering Others within the country and without. Those possibly transgressive subjects in the old and new world were to be deprived of their agency by such 'language of empire', the language of Self as imagined by Nebrija as a tool of empowering the Spanish expansionism. And it is through that language that Columbus 'discovered' his others at the genesis of modern European imperialism.

One of the inevitable misfortunes Columbus had when he believed he was in 'Inde', a peripheral zone to the kingdom of Cathay, was that his translator, one Torres, could only speak Hebrew, Cardian and Arabic. Observe the entry on November 23rd, 1492 in his Journal of the first voyage:

... and beyond this cape there stretched out another land or cape, which also trended to the east, which those Indians whom he had with him called 'Bohio.' They said that this land was very extensive and that in it were people who had one eye in the forehead, and others whom they called 'Canibals.' Of these last, they showed great fear, and when they saw that this course was being taken, they were speechless, he says, because these people ate them and because they are very warlike. The admiral says that he well believes that there is something in this, but that since they were well armed, they must be an intelligent people, and he believed that they may have captured some men and that, because they did not return to their own land, they would say that they were eaten. They believed the same of the Christians and of the admiral, when some first saw them²⁾.

This entry is significant not only because it provides the first appearance of the word 'Canibals' ('Canibales' in original Spanish) but also because we here glimpse, along with Columbus's doubt about the Indians' claim about the man-eaters, a kind of dialogical reciprocity in the discourse of cannibalism: the first encounter with an alien race, European or Indian, will produce fear and suspicion on both parts that strangers might eat man's flesh. The encounter between different cultures hinges on the reciprocal (though not symmetrical) nature of cannibalistic discourse.

As to the above accounts in Columbus's diary, questions will immediately arise:

how well Columbus understood what the Indians said to him; how accurately Las Casas, transcriber of the present record, conveys the contents of the original diary now lost; the degree of authenticity of the Indians' testimony and the sincerity of their intention in telling such fantastic stories to the newcomers. Among these questions, most important to our present concerns is the one related to a signifying process manifested in Columbus' acts of naming that involve relations of power and domination and the reciprocity inherent in that naming process. We may argue that the naming of the Others as 'Canibales' itself constitutes the referent as 'ugly, defiant, rebellious, man-eating etc.', as Columbus contingently requires that naming once he is already in the domain of the Others to be subjugated.

In the above account, there appear two local names—'Bohio' and 'Canibals'. Yet from that day on, the former 'Bohio' (meaning a 'hut' in Arawakan) is marginalized, while the latter is foregrounded as a normative term—whatever its meaning is in the original Arawakan terminology³⁾—to signify the practice of man-eating: not only will the adjacent area be called 'the islands of Canibals' but its inhabitants will be named 'Caribes'. The process of marginalizing 'Bohio' and centralizing 'Canibals' is however, accompanied by dialogic recognition of the reciprocity of the sign, as well as by suspicion about the real existence of man-eaters⁴⁾.

Fantasy about man-eating is probably as old and widespread as human history and community. When encountering an alien people whose appearances and customs are distinctively different from one's own, one's phobia/philia about man-eating, with both fascination towards and repugnance against it, is released both as a practice and discourse. It is quite likely that during those first encounters between the Spaniards and the native islanders, the incoming strangers inquired, at every possible opportunity, sometimes with apparent threat, about the properties and the lives of the islanders, about man-eating, amazonian females, monsters, golds, and other fantasies familiarized to the Europeans through a long history of the exotic tales about Others, which were quite beyond the natives' understanding.

Columbus, as Ivan Illich reminds us, 'wrote in two languages [Latin and Spanish] he did not speak, and spoke several ones [including Genovese and Portuguese]. None of these facts seems to have been problematic to his contemporaries. However, it is also true that none of these were languages in the eyes of Nebrija⁵⁾'.

It is a paradox that 'Canibals', a vernacular word orally apprehended by Columbus, became one of the most powerful terms in the written literature of conquest. The

process of suppressing the initial reciprocity is also that of obfuscating the original orality, in which Columbus himself was a pivotal agent. For the 'Canibals' sign to be circulated as a normative representation of the transgressive Other, it is necessary to conceal the initial dialogism recognized at its inception. As the sign articulated its power over its referent, the referent itself—the body and agency of the man-eater and the practice of man-eating, whether the practice was actual or not—was marginalized.

2. Dialogism and Unilaterality: Anthropophagi and Canibals

The dialogism detected in Columbus's Journal is reiterated in Sebastian Munster's account of Columbus's voyage included in *Cosmographie*, which was translated into English by Richard Eden in 1553. This provides one of the first English references to the 'canibals' in America, which was rapidly displacing the Greek term 'anthropophagi'. Here, the word 'Canibales' is introduced by the author in his section title, 'Of the people called Canibales or Anthropophagi, which are accustomed to eate mans fleshe', still accompanied by 'Anthropophagi'. Then the text reads:

Whereas the people of the forenamed Ilanders [the two islands Columbus called Johanna and Hispana], fled at the sight of our menne, the cause thereof was, that they suspected them to haue been Canibals, that cruel and fearse people which eate mans fleshe, which nacion our men had ouerpassed, leauing them on the southsyde. But after they had knowledge of the contrary, they made greuous complaynt to our men, of the beastly and fearse maners of these Canibals, which were no lesse cruel agaynst them, then the Tyger or the Lyon agaynste tame beastes. Sebastian Munster, 'The Second English book on America. A treatyse of the newe India, with other new founde landes and Ilandes, ... after the descripcion of Sebastian Munster in his boke of vniversall Cosmographie:⁶⁾

This is a typical instance of exclusion of the third term. As the Spanish visitors 'proved' to be, far from cannibalistic invaders, benevolent agents shielding the islanders from the cruel 'Canibals', the 'Canibals' themselves were banished beyond the boundary as invisible Others, who, as the excluded third term, kept the binarism between the kind and strong Spaniard and the gentle and obedient Arawak. The reciprocity within the naming process is here turned into unilaterality. The binary opposition between Us and

Them was complete with 'Canibals' as a consciously employed sign of differentiation. This sign—now devoid of the reciprocity—could now be arbitrarily applied.

In fact it is remarkable that the so-called 'First Three English Books on America', a large part of which comprises of chronicles of Spanish conquest translated by Richard Eden, are suffused with the word 'Canibales'. The 'ferocious and daringly cruel' tribe was rapidly gaining recognition among readers in Europe, and the Classical/African term 'anthropophagi' was increasingly displaced by Modern/American 'Canibales' of 'Caribes'.

The cruel savagery of the 'canibales' was at the centre of the European imagination which tried to justify the violent colonial enterprise. Peter Martyr's 'Preface' to his 'Decades' translated also by Eden in 1555 represents this sentiment. According to Martyr, the bondage of the native people to the Spanish is:

suche as is much rather to be desired then theyr former libertie which was to the cruell Canibales rather a horrible licenciousnesse then a libertie, and to the innocent so terrible a bondage, that in the myddest of theyr ferefull idlenesse, they were euer in daunger to be a prey to those manhuntynge woolues. 'The Decades of the newe worlde or west India, conteynyng the nauigations and conquests of the Spanyardes'⁷⁾.

According to this logic, the European conquest was mutually beneficial, even more so to the natives who were given a true 'libertie' free from 'cruell' and 'licencious Canibales'. This kind of reasoning led to the binary distinction between the 'gentle Arawaks' and 'cruell Canibales'. A key to the crucial discursive distinction between 'anthropophagi' and 'Canibales' lies in this binarism, and in order to examine this claim let us for a moment look at some classic examples of 'anthropophagi'.

The term 'anthropophagi' which had been used since the time of Homer and Herodotus signified those who lived beyond the Black Sea—beyond the limit of civilized human habitation from the Greek point of view: it referred to those ultimate Other residing beyond rational understanding. For instance, in Herodotus:

The Androphagi ('Man-eaters') have the most savage customs of all men; they pay no regard to justice, nor make use of any established law. They are nomads, and wear a dress like the Scythians; they speak a peculiar language; and of these nations, are the only people that eat human flesh⁸⁾.

Here we can detect a few themes which will later declare themselves in Columbus's account of the native Americans. They are the claims that there are connections between the peculiarity of language and that of custom—having no sense of justice or law, nomadism, dressing like the Scythians who, as far as the Greeks were concerned, comprised the nation of marginality between the civilized and the barbaric. However, this account by no means suggests any possible encounter between the two.

In order for the man-eaters to be 'discovered', the word 'Canibales' had first to be discerned and recorded in the language of empire. The statement 'language is the perfect instrument of empire' is ascribed to the Bishop of Avila when in 1492 he presented Nebrija's *Gramatica* to the Queen Isabella of Castile, who had asked 'What is it for?'⁹⁾ This claim has been proved true by subsequent histories of colonization: the social infrastructure of the colonies was constructed along the boundaries dividing between the literate and the illiterate in dominant European tongues. Slaves might become professional craftsmen and artisans, the (semi-)literate office jobs such as clerks and book-keepers were exclusively white reserves.

3. Identity and Naming: Carib and Arawak

When Columbus heard the word for the first time on the 23rd November 1492 having acquired a surprising amount of information for a man who had been in this region for less than six weeks without any previous knowledge of its languages, he still seemed to have some doubt about the authenticity of the information. But after three months' experience with the native people, Columbus was able to positively 'identify' the man-eating 'caribes' whom he met on the northern coast of Hispaniola, because they looked so different from—'uglier' than—the other natives. In his *Journal*, Columbus described on 13th January 1493 how he encountered one of the 'Caribs' for the first time:

... He sent the boat to land at a beautiful beach, in order that they might take ajes to eat, and they found some men with bows and and arrows, with whom they paused to talk, and they bought two bows and many arrows, and asked one of them to go to speak with the admiral in the caravel, and he came. The admiral says that he was more ugly in appearance than any whom he had seen. He had his face all stained with charcoal, although in all other parts they are accustomed to paint themselves with various colours; he wore all his hair very long and drawn back and tied behind,

and then gathered in meshes of parrots' feathers, and he was as naked as the others. The admiral judged that he must be one of the Caribs who eat men and that the gulf, which he had seen yesterday, divided the land and that it must be an island by itself... The admiral says further that in the islands which he had passed they were in great terror of Carib: in some islands they call it 'Caniba,' but in Espaniola 'Carib'; and they must be a daring people, since they go through all the islands and eat the people they can take¹⁰ .

In a way, this entry is more remarkable than the previous entries quoted above, for this was the day when the hitherto mythical 'canibales' were personified into the 'Caribs.' A linguistic history of these 'modern' terms referring to man-eating can be summarized as follows: first 'canibales' which Columbus heard on the 23rd November, 1492 was introduced into Spanish and the other European languages, referring to a group of existing tribe called the Caribs as Columbus later heard from those who feared of them. The implication of man-eating was the lynchpin of the two identical words. Gradually, there established a distinction between 'cannibal' (man-eater) and 'Carib' (native of the Antilles). Much later, 'Cannibalism', the general term referring to the custom was introduced (OED's first entry is dated 1796), completing the distinction between the behaviour and the people, hence establishing not only the actual background of mythical tale of the 'island of canibales' which fascinated so many voyagers/writers after Columbus, but the Carib/Arawak binarism (each term of which was, as it were, separated by the 'gulf' dividing the two regions respectively inhabited by them) that provided justification for genocide of the indigenous people. Apart from Columbus's observation that the man had 'many arrows'—the feature that might match one of the characteristics of the 'canibals' reported by the natives on the 23rd November—, his judgment depended solely on the man's external appearances, that is to say, socio-cultural traits of dressing codes and facial decorations. What is more disturbingly predictable is that, as Columbus himself admitted ('he was as naked as the others'), there was no way of telling ipso facto the difference between the 'gentle Arawak' and the 'cruel Carib' from their overall extrinsic features. The only way to distinguish between the two was their intrinsic characters: the one was by nature gentle and servile, hence cooperative to the Spanish, attentive to Christian dogmas and fearful of and victim to the canibales'; the other was the opposite—simply because they possessed and were ready to use their 'weapons.' As Columbus confidently stated in the same entry as above, when he learned that the 'Caribs' had

unsuccessfully assaulted the Spanish: '... they would be afraid of the Christians, for without doubt, he says, the people there are, as he says, evil-doers, and he believed that they were those from Carib and that they eat men ...¹¹⁾'

Columbus' Christian identity, as it frequently did during the course of his voyage, came to provide a rational explanation to the internal nature of the 'Carib.' Judging from the above passage, there are two main reasons for Columbus's judgment of the man as a 'Carib.' One is his ugly appearance (stained face, long hair, naked body), the other is his ability to fight and resist (weapon, fortitude, independent aptitude which enables him to come alone among the Europeans). At the root of his 'judgment,' however, lies Columbus' reasoning that for him whose quest for gold was so far unfruitful, 'gold' and 'Canibals' became gradually substitutable for each other as the object of his desire.

This is suggested by the fact of Columbus's persistent questioning the man about existence of gold. In his mind, instead of unpromising prospects of gold, slaves came to be foregrounded as gifts to be brought back and presented to the Spanish monarchs. From this day on, he tried to capture as many 'Caribs' as possible. As far as the colonizer was concerned, the term 'Carib' could be conveniently applied to those who possessed weapons and seemed to daringly resist were all signified as 'Carib/Canibals,' hence their slavery legitimated. Columbus after all did not meet the 'real man-eaters'; instead, he 'invented' the 'Caribs.'

If we want to talk about the 'discovery' in real terms, it was the natives of the 'Caribbean' islands who discovered Columbus and his men as ferocious and greedy murderers. An ironic intervention in this issue of reciprocal process of 'discovery' is made by Jean Cocteau in his Potomac, where the Indians say on seeing the white people landing on their island, 'Oh, Mr Columbus and his men. We are discovered!'

Furthermore, the actual identity of the fierce tribe did not matter here. It was sufficient to suppose that they were fearless and consequently likely to pose an obstacle to European colonization; as the diary continued: 'and he says that if they were not Caribs, at least they must be neighbours of them and have the same customs, and they are a fearless people, not like the others of the other islands, who are cowardly beyond reason and without weapons¹²⁾'.

In fact, this neighbourhood could limitlessly expand as the Europeans wished to set new boundaries between the 'fearless' and the 'cowardly': the 'customs' were 'discovered' wherever they were 'a daring people' with weapons in their hand. Founded here is a

discursive power base supported by this flexible sign system of the 'Carib/canibales,' which is linked to the most horrific violence upon human beings for the last 500 years on the American continents, Africa, Asia and the Pacific Islands where the force of the European colonialism has left its marks.

After several years of Spanish settlement in the islands, it became no longer possible to know what that fatal word 'canibales' really meant in the native language, because the 'Caribs' were all annihilated by direct conflicts against the Spanish, by diseases, or by slave labour. Nevertheless, as the Oxford English Dictionary exemplifies, the main OED entry for 'Carib' reads: 'One of the native race which occupied the southern islands of the West Indies at their discovery: in earlier times often used with the connotation of cannibal.' On the other hand, 'Cannibal' is defined as: 'In 16th c. pl. Canibales, originally one of the forms of the ethnic name Carib or Caribes, a fierce nation of the West Indies, who are recorded to have been anthropophagi, and from whom the name was subsequently extended as a descriptive term.... A man (esp. a savage) that eats human flesh; a man-eater, an anthropophagite. Originally proper name of the man-eating Caribs of the Antilles.' In a word, then, OED defines 'Carib' as 'cannibal,' and 'cannibal' as 'Carib', without mentioning why it is so in the first place. Here, under the name of scholastic impartiality—manifested in the phrase 'who are recorded to have been'—, the 'historical principle' of the dictionary concocts the true 'origin' of the words which in fact accidentally 'originated' from Columbus's misunderstanding—or willful interpretation—of a word out of a native's mouth possibly referring to anything from a tribe name to an ingenious gadget. (One can even argue that this historical principle does not take the 'origin' of these words seriously enough, because Columbus's Journal specifically claims that they are of the native origin not of the Greek one.) As the historical origin is invented, so the very identity of the 'recorder', as well as his motive for the act of recording, is withheld. The tautological dilemma that has caught the Carib/cannibal since Columbus identified the two as synonymous.

Bearing in mind this tautology and in view of subsequent history of brutal colonization, it would be of only limited epistemological interest to ask whether the native of the Antilles did in fact eat human flesh or not; for even if the natives did exercise cannibalism as a social form of religious ritual, would it have justified annihilation of a tribe? One of the answers to this question is supplied by Michel de Montaigne, who, seeing the Tupinamba Indians in Rouen in 1562, recorded their words, when they were asked if there were any thing by which they were impressed among the Europeans. The

Tupis answered, according to Montaigne:

They had perceived there were men amongst us full gorged with all sortes of commodities [gorgez de toutes sortes de commoditez], and others which hunger-starved, and bare with need and povertie, begged at their gates: and found it strange, these moyties so needy could endure such an injustice, and that they tooke not the others by the throate, or set fire on their houses¹³⁾.

What Montaigne provides, through the mouths of the native people of the lands which were about to be colonized by Europe, is a rhetorical question: which is the real 'cannibal', Europe or its Other?

The colonizers who tried to construct their identities according to such paradigms as white, Christian, civilized, rational, sexually controlled termed those who transgressed their norms as 'savage,' impugning 'abnormalities' to the native population. Yet in describing the Other's transgressive behaviour, the colonizers in fact expressed their own fantasized desires (and actual behaviour)—treachery, rape, murder, misogyny, sexual deviance. Thus demonization of the hybridities of the native people by the omnipotent sign of 'Canibals' can also reciprocally be applied to those markers for the 'civilized,' for the colonizers themselves were hybrid, transgressing entities. 'Canibals' could be assigned not only to the Indians but also to the Europeans. If the native Arawakans had known the name of the alien visitor to their land in 1492, the ferocious man-eaters could have been called 'Columbals'. William Arens in a similar vein says: 'The word for man-eater is now cannibal and not 'arawakibal', because Columbus first encountered the latter, who were eager to fill him on the gossip about their enemies to the south¹⁴⁾.'

4. The Spanish and the English: Logic of Colonization

One of the most effective strategies to designate Self as pure and as remote from hybridity as possible was to produce an alien race close to its own European origin, and to emphasize differences between the two—say, between the Spaniards and the English. This is the moralized logic behind the English colonizing ideology as a latecomer to the expansionist venture. These reasonings can be abundantly detected in accounts of expeditions by English captains such as Francis Drake or Walter Raleigh. Their main objective was to accelerate the English colonial interests which lagged far behind the

Spanish. If we may call Jamestown in Virginia the first permanent English settlement in America, its establishment in 1607 (as was the case with the French who built their Quebec colony in 1608) was more than 100 years behind the Spanish pioneering precedent. The historical backwardness of the English in their colonial venture forced them to engage in piracy on a national scale by pillaging the gold the Spanish had dug out of their central American mines, and to try to justify this action under the auspices of the idealized Queen Elizabeth who, contrary to the evil Catholic King of Spain, truly cared for the wellbeing of the native population. This need for differentiation has again transformed the 'Canibal' topos as a commonplace theme into the 'Canibal' trope.

Early English intervention in America was more piratical than commercial. Francis Drake (in)famously hijacked so many Spanish ships with their gold so as to give maximum damage to now the mighty empire in the Spanish Main. His main enemy was not the Indians per se but the Spanish and the Indians associated with them. To outmanoeuvre them, Drake even claimed to be affiliated with 'Symerons,' whom he explained, 'A black people, which about 80. yeares past, fledd from the Spaniards their Masters, by reason of their cruelty, and are since growne to a nation, vnder two Kings of their owne: the one inhabiteth to the west, th'other to the East of the way from Nombre de Dios to Panama.' The accounts of his guerrilla tactics against the Spaniards are sometimes exhilarating as well as sinister, trying to create a nationalistic illusion that the pirate makes a genuine emancipator:

Our Captaine willing to vse those Negroes well (not hurting himselfe) set them ashore vpon the maine, that they might perhaps ioyne themselues to their contrymen the Symerons, and gaine their liberty if they would, or if they would not, yet by reason of the length and troublesomenes of the way by land to Nombre de Dios, hee might preuent any notice of his comming, which they should be able to giue. For hee was loath to put the towne to too much charge (which hee knew they would willingly bestowe) in prouiding before hand, for his entertainment, and therefore hee hastned his going thither, with as much speed and secrecy as possibly hee could¹⁵⁾.

To confound the Spanish, Drake no doubt would have ventured on fighting alongside of the 'cannibales'; yet it was not 'their liberty' but a tactical gain that Drake aspired to. It suffices here to remind ourselves that the first English Atlantic slave voyage by John Hawkins—in the vein of English piratical tradition Hawkins kidnapped 300 Africans

in Sierra Leone, 'partly by the sworde, and partly by other meanes,' and sold them in Hispaniola, which brought 'prosperous successe and much gaine to himself and the aforesayde adventurers'¹⁶⁾—was carried out ten years before in 1562, which initiated the English maritime boom in the West African slave trade (although, of course, the Africans themselves and the Arab traders there had been practicing slavery for centuries).

If the Spanish colonists built cities and from there governed the countryside by manipulating the native labour, the English were first and foremost frontiersmen cultivating the lands. It was vital for them to settle down as quickly and efficiently as possible to acquire arable lands for their own food production, although the early colonists were notably bad at this, and almost wholly depended on the goodwill of the local Indians. Once the logistical problems of survival were settled, they started harvesting crops. Virginians first tried to farm sugar unsuccessfully (their sugar industries later flourished in the West Indian colonies—Barbados and Jamaica, colonized in 1625 and 1655 respectively—with the massive import of African slaves); they turned to tabaco which from the 1620's onward became the region's major export, produced by the indentured British labourers and black slaves¹⁷⁾.

Richard Hakluyt the elder (of Middle Temple) represented this view when he stressed the need for colonists's agricultural production and maintenance of the settlements as a prelude to profitable trade:

The soile and climate first is to be considered, and you are with Argus eies to see what commoditie by industrie of man you are able to make it to yeeld, that England doth want or doth desire...¹⁸⁾

In order to attain the three ends of the Virginia enterprise—'To plant Christian religion,' 'To trafficke,' and 'To conquer'¹⁹⁾, Hakluyt recommends 'a gentle course,' which should distinguish the English from the precursor Spaniard:

In regard whereof, many circumstances are to be considered; and principally, by what meane the people of those parties may be drawn by all coutesie into love with our nation; that we become not hatefull unto them, as the Spaniard is in Italie and in the West Indies, and elsewhere, by their maner of usage: for a gentle course without crueltie and tyrannie best answereth the profession of a Christian, best planteth Christian religion; maketh our seating most void of blood, most profitable

in trade of merchandise, most firme and stable, and least subiect to remoove by practise of enemies. But that we may in seating there, not be subiect wholly to the malice of enemies, and may be more able to preserve our bodies, ships, and goods in more safetie, and to be knowen to be more able to scourge the people there, civill or savage, than willing to offer any violence²⁰⁾.

The most important aspect of the conquest was, according to Hakluyt, to expel the native people from their lands with minimum force, preferably without recourse to violence despite the fact that the Europeans in general depended on the Indians for subsistence. These pragmatic considerations had no room for such indulgence in a philosophical argument about the Indians' humanity as the one contended between Bartolome de Las Casas and J. G. Sepulveda from 1550 to 1551 in Valladolid. As far as English pragmatism was concerned, it was the 'cannibal' rather than Christianity that came to avail itself of the task.

5. Differentiation and Binarism: Raleigh and Cannibals

'Cannibal' was utilized as a sign of differentiation between the rival colonists, as the following passage from Walter Raleigh's *The Discovery of the Large, Rich and Beautiful Empire of Guiana* suggests:

Among manie other trades those Spaniards vsed in Canoas to passe to the riuers of Barema, Pawroma, and Dissequebe, which are on the south side of the mouth of Orenoque, and there buie women and children from the Canibals, which are of that barbarous nature, as they will for 3 or 4 hatchets sell the sonnes and daughters of their owne brethren and sisters, and for somewhat more euen their own daughters: heerof the Spaniards make great profit, for buying a maid of 12 or 13 yeeres for three or fower hatchets, they sell them againe at Marguerita in the west Indies for 50 and 100 pesoes, which is so many crownes²¹⁾.

Here the 'Cannibals' are indeed naturalized as 'barbarous,' but their barbarity is interpreted as a crude commercial greed (not unlike that of the indigenous black African slave traders), rather than as a natural bloodthirstiness: their nature can only give an explanation for their behaviour which is more important to Raleigh. The 'Cannibals' are

to blame because they forsake their family ties for the material profit gained from the mercantile network constructed by the capitalistic Spanish. What makes the 'Cannibals' truly barbarous is not their intrinsic cultural features but their participation in the intruding European economy initiated by those Spaniards. The binary opposition is squarely set between the bad Spanish and the good English (who will never encourage the 'Cannibals' into this kind of inhuman barter), with the 'Cannibals' as the third term at once sustaining the binarism and excluded from both of the terms as the culturally alien, the inhumanly callous and the economically instrumentalized²²⁾.

Here the final target of discrimination is the Spaniards, and the 'cannibal' sign is employed as a symbol of the shrewd yet manipulated tribe. In fact, for Raleigh, these 'cannibals' need not represent man-eaters at all: it is enough to verify that they are inhuman and evil enough to be associated with the Spaniards—chief rival in his colonialist enterprise. Raleigh attempts to establish a clear moral distinction between 'us'—the English—and 'them'—the Spaniards. Here the same rhetorical strategy is employed with more complexity in which the distinction is underlined in economic and sexual terms. The imaginary tour-de-force of this passage deserves a lengthy quotation:

This Arawacan Pilot with the rest, feared that we would haue eaten them, or otherwise haue put them to some cruell death, for the Spaniards to the end that none of the people in the passage towards Guiana or in Guiana it selfe might come to speech with vs, perswaded all the nations, that we were men eaters, and Canibals: but the poore men and women had seen vs, and that we gaue them meate, and to euerie one some thing or other, which was rare and strange to them, they began to conceiue the deceit and purpose of the Spaniards, who indeed (as they confessed) tooke from them both their wiues, and daughters daily, and vsed them for the satisfying of their owne lusts, especially such as they tooke in this maner by strength. But I protest before the maiestie of the liuing God, that I neither know nor beleeeue, that any of our companie one or other, by violence or otherwise, euer knew any of their women, and yet we saw many hundreds, and had many in our power, and of those very yoong, and excellently fauored which came among vs without deceit, starke naked. Nothing got vs more loue among them then this vsage, for I suffred not anie man to take from anie of the nations so much as a Pina, or a Potato roote, without giuing them contentment, nor any man so much as to offer to touch any of their wiues or daughters: which course, so contrarie to the Spaniards (who tyrannize ouer

them in all things) drew them to admire hir Maiestie, whose commandment I told them it was, and also woonderfully to honour our nation²³⁾.

As in Columbus's testimony on 23 November 1492, the discourse of cannibalism here elicits a certain reciprocity which is manipulated to demonize that false originator: it is the Spaniards who are now excluded as the third term, because they have transgressed the 'universal'—European and Indian—code of human ethics. With the exclusion of these 'white devils,' a commonwealth based on an imaginary reciprocal accord and well-being is established between the Arawakans and the English. Alongside the innocent purity of the Arawakan women, and the obedient gullibility of the Arawakan men, the English, endowed with gentlemanly sexual controllability and generosity guaranteed by the saintly authority of Queen Elizabeth, can build an ideal land of mutual wealth and ethical enlightenment. What is definitively lacking in this republic is concrete presence of the ferocious man-eaters themselves who have a disturbing capacity to resist and subvert such a program. As the marginalization by the 'Canibal' sign system is already complete, there is no place for that absolute Others who with their weapons and daringness might in fact assault the bodies of the dominant colonizers.

Raleigh mentions that the 'Cannibal' sign is employed by the Spaniards against the English within the Spanish plot to prevent the natives from doing business with the English. In this kind of tit-for-tat linguistic game within the European factions to gain the natives's approval and to justify their colonialist activities on the grounds that they exercised them for saving them from evil (be it that of the 'Cannibals' or the 'Spaniards'), it is the 'cannibals' themselves who are eternally marginalized, displaced and depersonalized. If any reciprocity exists in Raleigh's imaginary 'empire' (a glittering commonwealth not unlike the fool's gold his men were reported to have brought back from there), it is between the 'poor men and women' and the subjects of 'her Majesty' (with the Spanish as the discriminated third term). In this nation there is simply no place for the 'cannibals', who are now not only displaced but also discursively nullified. If the 'Cannibals' can be applied to one set of European nationals by another, the sign merely functions as a means of demonization without ambivalence inherent at its inception. First the Spaniards employed, it is reported, the 'cannibal' sign as a common indicator of cruelty; then the English more subtly manipulate the 'cannibal' discourse by at once distancing themselves from the 'Cannibals' and from the Spanish. Instead of recognizing a subversive ability to devour human flesh and resist the colonizing forces, Raleigh here

creates the notion of the Other (now indiscriminately inclusive of the 'Cannibals' and the 'Arawaks' alike) as a vacant signifier devoid of cultural specificities outside of their assigned role as a boundary marker fabricated by the dominant culture. In this process, the 'cannibals' are absolutely marginalized as a mere sign of 'the Other's Other' while as an imaginary substance another 'Other's Other'—the native female—is foregrounded.

It is not difficult to question the validity of Raleigh's claim here. How on earth was it possible for the Arawaks to distinguish between the English and the Spanish and begin 'to conceive the deceit'? Any European would have given 'something or other' to the natives to court their favour. It seems a far cry from giving them trifles to sexually respecting their women. The sexual language forcefully yet somewhat uneasily takes over the 'cannibal' discourse only to be replaced by a de-sexualized rhetoric sanctifying 'her Majesty²⁴⁾'.

For Raleigh, the 'Cannibals'-sign serves two distinct ideological purposes. One is to confirm the absolute (which was in fact relative—a matter of degree) difference between the English and the Spaniards. The other is to create an illusion of congruence between the natives and the English, both of whom revere and idealize the chaste, daughterly and the motherly, valorizing the unlikely pair of the wives of the native men and the Queen Elizabeth who now stands in God's place. Here it is implicitly assumed that the Arawacan women 'belong' to their men (as the Other's Other) waiting and willing to be conquered with their sheer nakedness by the English, as the English company of men are subject to their captain Raleigh and ultimately to the Queen (from Raleigh's point of view, then, the English soldiers are part of a collective enterprise whose sexual and monetary desire are felt to be hard to cope with). At the crossroads of racial, gender, class and religious difference, one difference—between the English and the Spanish—is formalized by Raleigh's rhetorical force employing the 'Cannibals'-sign, while the other differences—between the Arawak and the English, between the soldiers and the captain—are suppressed. As a result, the original Columbian binarism between the good 'Arawak' and the bad 'Carib' (who is now so marginalized that it is almost impossible to find any trace) is reinforced in Raleigh's rhetorical strategy to transform tensions among the various forms of particular differences into the universality of pure difference. If any notion of reciprocity exists in Raleigh's account, it is somewhat misleading, because the natives—whether 'Arawak' or 'Carib'—are deprived both of a voice expressing their suspicion that it is not the natives but the conquering Europeans who are cannibalistically manipulative, and of a power to reappropriate the cannibal power to resist. In the quintessential figure of the sexually

desired and desiring woman, the natives are there to be unilaterally seen by the colonialist gaze as a non-agency. In this neatly divided scheme of differentiation, it is the 'cannibals' who are discursively expelled, leaving no trace of dialogical relationship between the eating and the eaten.

It can be generally observed in the texts produced by the English, relative newcomers in the colonialist enterprise, that the 'cannibal' sign was dissociated from its (imaginary) intrinsic feature, man-eating. We could perhaps argue that a long-term English strategy to keep 'friendship' with the native population included a linguistic scheme which dismantles the original equation—the 'cannibal/Carib' =man-eaters= the native of the Antilles. On one hand, it reinforced the Arawak/Carib binarism; on the other hand, however, as the 'cannibal' sign is deprived of its referent, the text is suffused with the contented members of the illusory 'empire'—the 'large' and bountiful Queen, the 'rich' and gentle Englishmen, the 'beautiful' and innocent maids of Guiana. There is no room for the 'cannibals' in this kind of con/text.

6. Sign and Referent: Montaigne Again

What was 'discovered' by Columbus was, rather than the Indians or America, the 'canibales'-sign which was opportunistically applied to its referents according to the colonizers' needs. To reveal their opportunism, we would be scarcely better off than revisiting Montaigne for what cannibalism actually means. According to Montaigne, man-eating is:

not, as some imagine, to nourish themselves with it (as anciently the Scythians wont to doe), but to represent an extreame and inexpiable revenge. Which we prove thus; some of them perceiving the Portugales, who had confederated themselves with their adversaries, to use another kinde of death when they took them prisoners; which was, to burie them up to the middle, and against the upper part of the body to shoot arrowes, and then being almost dead, to hang them up; they supposed, that these people of the other world (as they who had sowed the knowledge of many vices amongst their neighbours, and were much more cunning in all kindes of evils and mischief than they) under-tooke not this manner of revenge without cause, and that consequently it was more smartfull and cruell than theirs, and thereupon began to leave their old fashion to follow this. I am not sorie we note the barbarous

horror of such an action, but grieved, that prying so narrowly into their faults we are so blinded in ours. I thinke there is more barbarisme in eating men alive, then to feed upon them being dead; to mangle by tortures and torments a body full of lively sense, to roast him in peeces, to make dogges and swine to gnaw and teare him in mamockes (as wee have not only read, but seene very lately, yea and in our owne memorie, not amongst ancient enemies, but our neighbours and fellow-citizens; and which is worse, under pretence of pietie and religion) than to roast him and eat him after he is dead²⁵).

Montaigne's argument that accords the cannibalistic discourse symmetrical mutuality was all too rare. What one can do is to return to Columbus of 1492, where we started, and uncover duplicity in the deceptive reciprocity in the Columbian paradigm shift from 'anthropophagi' to 'cannibal' in order to recover the same substance hidden behind these signs. Those distinctions between the two terms, 'anthropophagi' and 'cannibal' however elaborate, are but linguistic differences—products of the magical representations by European languages, as what looks surreal and grotesque such as cannibalism is in fact fundamental to the workings of the discourse of European colonialism.

Notes

- 1) Quoted in Ivan Illich, 'Vernacular Values' in his *Shadow Work* (Boston and London: Marion Boyers, 1981), p. 34.
- 2) *The Journal of Christopher Columbus*, trans. Cecil Jane, rev. L. A. Vigneras (London, 1968), pp. 68-9.
- 3) It is suggested that the Arawak word 'carib' meant either 'manioc eaters' or 'valiant warrior': see Philip P. Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492-1763* (Baltimore and London: 1992): p. 139, note 2.
- 4) Whether the practice of man-eating did exist or not is not a main concern here. However, scepticism against reality of cannibalism is expressed, among others, by William Arens, *The Man-eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (Oxford University Press, 1979); Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge University Press, 1982); and Philip P. Bouchner, *Cannibal Encounter: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492-1763* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). They all agree in admitting that there is no single reliable evidence of the native cannibalism in the region from 1492 to 1611. Some, however, dismiss their claim, especially Arens's ('no one has ever observed the purported cultural universal' [p. 46]) as an over-statement. Believers in Aztec human-eatings and the 19th-century cannibalism in the Pacific include: Marshall Sahlins, 'Culture as Protein and Profit', *New York Review of Books*,

- 25 (1978), no.18, 45-53; Sahlins, 'Cannibalism: An Exchange', *New York Review of Books*, 26 (1979), no.4, 45-7; Sahlins, 'Raw Women, Cooked Men, and Other 'Great Things' of the Fiji Islands' in *The Ethnography of Cannibalism*, ed. Paula Brown and Donald Tuzin (Washington D.C.: Society for Psychological Anthropology, 1983), pp.72-93; Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).
- 5) 'Vernacular Values', p.39.
 - 6) Translated out of Latin into Englishe. By Rycharde Eden. [London, 1553]' in Edward Arber ed., *The First Three English Books on America*. [?1511] -1555 A.D. (Birmingham, 1885), p. 29.
 - 7) Wrytten in the Latine tounge by Peter Martyr of Angleria, and translated into Englysshe by Rycharde Eden. (1555)' in Arber ed., *The First Three English Books*, p. 50.
 - 8) Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Henry Cary from the text of Baehr (London: The Folio Society, 1992), p. 270 (Book 4, 106).
 - 9) Quoted by Lewis Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), p. 8.
 - 10) *Journal*, pp. 146-7.
 - 11) *Journal*, p. 148.
 - 12) *Journal*, p. 148-9.
 - 13) 'Of the Caniballes', *The Essayes of Michel Lord of Montaigne*, trans. John Florio (1603), ed. Henry Morley (London & New York: George Routledge & Sons, 1886), p. 98.
 - 14) *The Man-Eating Myth*, p.45.
 - 15) Philip Nichols, Preacher, *Sir Francis Drake Reuiued: Calling vpon this dull or Effeminate Age, to folowe his Noble Steps for Golde & Siluer, By this Memorable Relation, of the Rare Occurrances (neuer declared to the World) in a Third Voyage, made by him into the West-Indies, in the Yeare 72. & 73. when Nombre de Dios was by him and 52. Others only in his Company, surprised.* (London: Printed by E.A. for Nicholas Bourne, 1626), sig. B4v-Cr (pp. 8-9).
 - 16) 'The First Voyage of John Hawkins, 1562-1563', in Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, And Discoveries of the English Nation, etc [1598-1600]*, 12 vols. [Glasgow: James MacLehose & Sons, 1903-5], X, pp. 7-8.)
 - 17) For sugar and tabaco industries in the British colonies, see Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, London: Sifton, 1985); Alan Kulikoff, *Tabaco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).
 - 18) Richard Hakluyt of Middle Temple (the elder), 'Inducements to the Liking of the Voyage intended towards Virginia in 40. and 42 degrees of latitude, written 1585. by M. Richard Hakluyt the elder, sometime student of the Middle Temple' in *The Original Writings & Correspondence of the Two Richard Hakluyts*, The Hakluyt Society, second series, no.LXXXVII, 2 vols. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1935), II, pp. 327-38; the quotations are from p. 333.

19) *ibid.*, p. 332.

20) *ibid.*, p. 334.

21) *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Bewtifvl Empyre of Gviana, With a relation of the great and Golden Citie of Manoa (which the Spanyards call El Dorado) And of the Prouinces of Emeria, Arromaia, Amapaia, and Other Countries, with their riuers, adioyning. Performed in the yeare of 1595. by Sir W.Raleigh Knight, Captaine of her Maiesties Guard, Lo. Warden of the Stanneries, and her Highnesse Lieutenant generall of the Countie of Cornewall.* (London: Robert Robinson, 1596), sig. Fr-Fv (pp. 33-4).

22) For the 'invisible' third term as a governing element sustaining the apparent symmetry in the binary opposition, which converts difference into hierarchy, see his discussions on logical typing in Anthony Wilden, *System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange* (London: Tavistock, 1980), pp. xxxiii-xxxv.

23) *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtifvl Empyre of Gviana*, sig. H2r-H2v (pp. 51-2).

24) Louis Montrose, discussing the 'convergence of Elizabethan discourses of sex, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and social rank' in Raleigh's text, detects a series of discursive 'reversals' -the English feeding the Indians instead of eating them as the Spaniards claimed; Europeans offering food to New World people instead of the usual case in which the Indians feeding the Europeans as an initial gesture of friendship. This discursive strategy is most powerfully manifested, according to Montrose, in the self-laudification of the English man: '[Raleigh's] contrary emphasis upon feminine innocence and vulnerability, upon the potential victimization of women, simultaneously disempowers them and legitimates their condition of dependency. It also reduces them to functioning as the collective instrument for making comparisons among men. It is crucial to Raleigh's text that what is at issue is not masculine sexual prowess but, on the contrary, the ability of European men to govern their concupiscible appetites.... it is precisely their refusal to abuse their own position of mastery over the Indians that is the measure of the Englishmen's collective self-mastery, that provides proof of the ascendancy of ... their erected wits over their infected wills. And this self-mastery might not only help them to distinguish themselves as Men from Women, to whom unruliness and lasciviousness were traditionally ascribed; it might also help them to distinguish themselves as Englishmen from the lustful and un-self-governable Spaniards. Here misogynistic sentiments subserve anti-Spanish ones, in a project aimed at mastering native Americans.' ('The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery', *Representations*, 33 [winter 1991] , Special Issue 'The New World', ed. Stephen Greenblatt, pp. 20-1.)

25) 'Of the Caniballes,' p. 96.