# *Introduction*

Fifteen-hundred-and-eighty-three might strike some readers as an odd date to use as the starting-point for a study of English colonial writing. Its significance lies not in its marking a decisive act, such as the embarkation of a voyage, the founding of a colony, a hard-fought battle with intransigent natives. Rather, 1583 marks the date of publication of an extremely influential and significant colonial text. I am referring to the translation into English and the publication in London of Bartolomé de Las Casas's *Brevíssima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*. That text, which Tom Conley and others have suggested marks the genesis of the so called "Black Legend," could also be said to mark the beginnings of the English attempts to fashion a national identity through colonial endeavor.[1]

If nothing else, the first English translation of *Brevíssima relación* demonstrates the extent to which England's colonial project was born, at least in part, out of a conscious desire to compete with its Catholic rivals (especially Spain) for power and prestige on the world stage. In spite of the complex European geopolitical context in which English colonialism was conceived, however, most scholars of Anglo-American colonial history have, until recently, treated the colonial phenomenon either as an exclusively American phenomenon or, conversely, as a European one. Accordingly, the study of the colonial period has remained surprisingly insular, as scholars from two distinct fields have consistently failed to engage in a dialogue. Scholars working in the field of American Studies have attempted to account for the origins of what has come to be known as the American self. It is my contention that these conventional – American exceptionalist – accounts are fundamentally anachronistic, insofar as they read back the later construction of an American national identity to its putative colonial "beginnings." Just as problematic, however, are some attempts

by scholars of the English renaissance that construct the colonial phenomenon as something that was exported intact from Europe. Rather than regarding colonialism as a complicated set of negotiations between the imperial nation and its colonies, these scholars have asserted that renaissance beliefs and perceptions were determinant in the construction of Europe's colonial empires.[2] To offer these critiques is not to suggest that the colonial period should be regarded as somehow detached from the subsequent emergence of an American nation. Nor is it to suggest that the study of renaissance themes cannot offer insight into Europe's colonial expansion. But it is to say that the study of the colonial period could benefit from a dialogue between these two approaches. In a sense, I intend this study as an attempt to inaugurate precisely such a dialogue.

In the pages ahead, I attempt to continue the recent work of American Studies scholars, who have painstakingly argued that the encounter between the European settlers and the indigenous populations should be placed at the center of our study of colonialism. But I also suggest that, by returning to the questions asked by an earlier generation of American Studies scholars, we can understand more fully the complicated role that the native populations played in England's attempts to articulate both a national identity and a colonial one. In so doing, I am pushing the the study of the colonial period in two new directions. First, I argue for a reading of the colonial period that attempts to render an account of both the European origins of colonial expansion and its specifically American consequences. Secondly, I argue for a broadening of the earlier interpretive framework, which focused almost exclusively on soteriological questions, to include a discussion of the colonial phenomenon in a multitude of contexts. More specifically, I suggest that we establish as our goal the understanding of colonial desire in all of its religious, political, psychological, cultural, social, and economic complexity. Although readers will inevitably perceive this study to have fallen short of this ambitious goal, I would ask them to treat it as a modest first step toward that ultimate goal.

As a means of achieving this synthesis of approaches to the colonial period, I have focused on what we might call the interpretive status of the native people. Rather than assuming that

the exploitation and destruction of native populations and their cultures could only signify something to a subsequent, more enlightened, generation, I argue that the native populations figured in complicated and not necessarily predictable ways in the writings of those who were doing the colonizing. Before we can understand the role that the native populations played in the English attempts to articulate a national identity through their colonial enterprise, we must first re-examine our assumptions about English national identity. Rather than functioning as a stable concept, against which colonists could define their various projects, English national identity was very much in flux. Indeed, it is my argument that the colonial project became one of the primary ways that the English used to articulate and define their own emerging sense of nationhood. Moreover, it is my purpose here to explore the interesting and complex ways that the native populations functioned in English attempts to accomplish the task of defining themselves.

As a prerequisite to our understanding the colonial period, I suggest that we recognize the allegorical dimensions of colonial writing, particularly those writings that offer representations of native persons. If allegory involves the construction of a narrative that points toward, and yet operates at a distance from, another narrative, then almost by its very nature, colonial activity would seem to encourage allegorical writing. Colonial endeavor is never an end in itself. It is always a means to an end. As such, the narration of the events in the colonial space always must connect itself to some ultimate goal, which is inevitably removed from the colony. Colonial writing therefore tells two stories: It narrates events in the colony, while referring to the desires of the nation. In suggesting that we read colonial texts as allegories, I should say that I am merely attempting to give substance to a claim that has formed the implicit basis of much of the work known as post-colonial studies. As one scholar of post-colonial literature has put it, "If allegory identifies a process of signification in which an image in a literary text is interpreted against a pre-existing master code or typological system," then one must recognize that "a similar process of interpreting signs has been used in imperial thinking to read the world and to legitimise the power relations it established within it."[3] My concern in this study has accordingly

been that of attempting to uncover the system of signification, within which colonial writing and its representations of native peoples functioned.

In the first chapter, I attempt to establish a theoretical and historical rationale for the reading of colonial texts as allegories. Rather than suggesting, however, that we can perform this task by resorting to simple "codes," I attempt to demonstrate the complex relationship among the interlocking discourses of nation and colony, Catholic and Protestant, and Self and Other. To grasp the complexity of these relationships, I suggest, is to begin to describe the notion of colonial desire. And rather than situating that desire entirely within a psychoanalytic framework, I argue for its historicization. As a means of achieving that historical understanding, I offer readings of Richard Hakluyt's *Discourse of Western Planting* and of the prefaces of two English translations of Bartolomé de Las Casas's *Brevíssima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*. Finally, I conclude the chapter with an examination of contemporary accounts of the development of national identity as a way to point us toward an understanding of the relationship between that phenomenon and colonialism.

In chapter 2, I focus on the first and third volumes of Theodor DeBry's *Great Voyages*, which are re-publications of Thomas Harriot's *Briefe and True Report* and Jean de Léry's *History of a Voyage*, respectively. It is my contention that these two texts and the accompanying engravings by Theodor DeBry can be read allegorically, and that the crucial keys to that allegory are to be found in a phrase uttered by Thomas Harriot, who argued that the goal of English colonial settlement was to get the "natives" to "fear and love" the English. DeBry, who saw in the Spanish atrocities in the New World simply another version of the persecution that he suffered as a Protestant in Europe, was determined to situate the colonial endeavors of the Protestants in the context of a narrative balanced between fear and love. In other words, the terror instilled by the Spanish would serve as the backdrop to the more moderate approach of Protestant colonizers, who recognized the value of both fear and love. To this end, DeBry subtly manipulates the ethnographic content of his images to produce a narrative that is as much about Protestant colonial ambitions as it is about ethnographic realism. DeBry's project, therefore, represents the beginnings of a Protestant ethnography – or, more precisely, the Prot-

estant appropriation of ethnographic images – that gives readers the first visual and textual renditions of the dynamic of fear and love that will inform much of subsequent Protestant colonial writing.

If the English, as they attempted to embody the ideals of Protestant colonialism, strove to construct their relationships with native populations as guided by love, the case of Ireland would seem to offer a significant counter-example. In chapter 3, therefore, I examine Edmund Spenser's infamous *A View of the Present State of Ireland*. But rather than asserting, as other critics have, that Spenser's most extreme pronouncements are driven exclusively by a profound racism, I urge us to look at the way that Spenser constructs the identities of the colonizing English and colonized Irish. Read in this way, Spenser's text becomes a lament on the failure of English identity within the colony. Ironically, Spenser is unable to perceive that the Protestant faith of the English could be used as a tool to construct an identity that could, in turn, ensure the success of the colony. Spenser, in other words, fails to perceive that the discourses of nation, colony, and faith could be constructed in allegorical relation to one another.

The English recognition of the power of Protestantism in promoting the colonial enterprise – and, conversely, of the power of colonialism in advancing the Protestant cause – would have to wait until influential members of the English clergy embraced England's colonial ambitions as their own. In chapter 4, I examine several sermons that were written, delivered, and published during the early days of the English colony in Virginia by Robert Gray, William Symonds, William Crashaw, Alexander Whitaker, and John Donne. These sermons suggest not only that a well-disciplined colony will be the product of love and fear, but also that the colonial project itself stands in allegorical relation to a much larger and more important set of goals. What is important is not simply the way one achieves control over one's colony, but also how that colonial control will contribute to the larger narrative of England's survival and advancement. If DeBry's *Great Voyages* offers readers an idealistic portrait of Protestant colonialism, then the Virginia sermons show a willingness to wrestle with the hard facts of colonialism. No longer tied to the restrictive notion that the integrity of English colonial identity can only be ensured by a bloodless colonialism, these ministers develop a subtle and

powerful rhetoric that allows them to incorporate the use of force into a colonial program, whose stated goal was the protection of the native populations.

In contrast to the Virginia divines, who provide a compelling rationale for situating England's colonial efforts within the context of the narrative of European geopolitical conflict, Roger Williams demonstrates that the colonial endeavor can offer English readers an allegory of the various internal doctrinal and political conflicts that threatened the integrity of their nation. This set of conflicts, and Williams's brilliant intervention in them in his *A Key into the Language of America*, serve as the subject of chapter 5. In his *Key*, Williams uses his representations of the native people to construct a devastating polemic against his rivals in the neighboring colony of Massachusetts Bay. The real power of Williams's text, however, lies in his ability to deploy Protestant colonial rhetoric against his fellow Protestants. By portraying himself as the lone practitioner of a colonialism committed to a loving and peaceful relationship with the native inhabitants, Williams demonstrates the enduring power of the Protestant commitment to love before fear in colonial matters. Moreover, Williams's text, and its subsequent reception, reveals England's own continuing desire to find in its colonies an idealized version of itself.

In the final chapter, we explore John Eliot's attempt to construct a Protestant colonial identity, not for readers in England, but for an explicitly colonial audience. Unlike Williams, who attempts to exploit the divisions among the colonists in order to gain support from English readers, Eliot attempts to heal those divisions by promoting his own efforts to convert the Indians. In his *Indian Dialogues*, Eliot confronts the paradoxical position that missionary work occupied in the English colonial scheme. Central to the rhetoric and yet marginal to the day-to-day operations of the colony, missionary work seemed to function as the marginal activity that ensured the stability and integrity of the core of Puritan colonial endeavor. Even in the praying towns themselves, Eliot's attempts to arrange the native populations into Christian communities, seemed indicative of this paradoxical status of missionary work. Located on the outskirts of Puritan settlements, the praying towns constituted in a literal/geographical sense the margins of Puritan culture in New England. Eliot's goal in the *Indian Dialogues*, therefore, is to move the missionary project from

the margins to the center. In other words, Eliot's project is deeply allegorical. By pursuing what has hitherto functioned as a marginal goal, namely the conversion of the Indians, Eliot suggests that his fellow colonists will actually be ensuring the achievement of their primary goal, namely the survival of English Protestantism in the New World.

Before turning to the task I have just outlined, I would like to situate my work in a slightly more personal context by saying that, in some very real sense, this book began in a graduate seminar on Milton. During that seminar, I couldn't help asking questions similar to the ones that propel me in this study – questions for which the complete answers lie on both sides of the Atlantic. What struck me then, and continues to strike me now, is the artificiality of the boundaries between the two seventeenth centuries – the British one and the American one. It is not my intention to account in this book for this separation, but rather to urge us to repair it. It is my contention that historical events that profoundly shaped the course of British history – the St. Bartholomew's Day massacres, the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the Laudian purges of the English clergy, the English Civil War, the execution of Charles I, the restoration of Charles II to the throne – also exerted an influence, more or less directly, upon England's emergence as a colonial power. Although it is not my purpose here to trace all of these connections, I believe that this study will demonstrate their importance, and it is my hope that this study will function as the beginning of a conversation that has been very long in coming.

CHAPTER ONE

# *The allegorical structure of colonial desire*

When he published his *Brevíssima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* in 1552 in Seville, Bartolomé de Las Casas almost certainly did not foresee the use to which the tract would be put over the next century-and-a-half.[1] To be sure, he intended his brutal exposé of the cruelty and inhumanity of the Spanish in the New World to bring about changes in Spanish colonial policy, but it is highly unlikely that Las Casas, a Catholic Bishop, would have anticipated, or even approved of, the Protestant appropriations of his text with which I will be concerned in this chapter. Translated into English and published in London four times between 1583 and 1699, the *Brevíssima relación* provided the English Protestants with justification for both their foreign policy toward Spain and their colonial policy in the New World. The cruelty so graphically described in the *Brevíssima relación*, which the English figured as typically Catholic and Spanish, enabled the English to see colonial endeavor as a means of defining what it meant to be English and what it meant to be Protestant. Moreover, the Protestant appropriation of this quintessentially Catholic text speaks to the methodology that I will employ in this study, for it is with the cultural work of colonial texts in the construction and maintenance of a national identity that I will be most concerned in the pages ahead.

It would be a gross oversimplification to suggest that the publication of one text set the course that English colonialism would take for the next one-hundred-and-fifty years. But it would be correct to say that one can see in the English republication of *Brevíssima relación* an attempt to fashion a coherent identity for a nation, whose commitment to colonialism and Protestantism, at least at the end of the sixteenth century, was in doubt. The two prefaces I will examine demonstrate the ease with which colonial writing can be made to do domestic work. By suggesting what might dis-

tinguish an imagined Protestant colonial undertaking, these prefaces implicitly ask what it meant to be a Protestant. By asking how the English as a nation would fashion their colonial enterprise, they were also asking what it meant to be English. And finally, in their insistent focus on the cruelty of the Spanish toward the native populations, the prefaces forge the crucial link between the behavior of colonizing nations and their identities.

That link between colonization and the construction of national and religious identities – and the role that the native populations played in rendering the connection visible – constitutes the subject of this study. It will be my argument that colonial writers frequently turned to allegory as a means of giving shape to this complicated and multivalent set of relations. Allegory, which I will suggest is the mode one turns to when the concept one is trying to articulate seems just out of reach – or, conversely, hopelessly lost to the past – gave colonial writers (and their readers) a means of imagining and expressing the tremendous religious, ideological, and economic potential implicit in the colonial undertaking itself. Before turning to Las Casas's *Brevíssima relación* and Richard Hakluyt's *Discourse of Western Planting*, as examples of the power of allegorical reading and writing, however, I will undertake to consider some of the theoretical issues implicit in my move toward allegory. I will conclude this chapter with a meditation on some of the possible connections between notions of allegory and notions of national identity.

## TYPOLOGY, ALLEGORY, DESIRE

As one might expect, descriptions of encounters between Indians and English settlers abound in the narratives generated during the colonial period. But until relatively recently, scholarly accounts of the history of the colonization of North America had rendered the native populations of this continent all but invisible. For Perry Miller, whose massive three-volume study of "the New England mind" constitutes the most comprehensive and complete study of colonial Puritanism we have, the Indians figure only in the margins. Indeed, so marginal are Indians in his study that they don't even merit a heading in his index. Miller implicitly accounts for his omission when he tells his readers that he has sought to tell the story of what he calls the "the intellectual culture of New

England."[2] And the unlettered Indians figured in that story only insofar as they constituted one of "the long list of afflictions an angry God had rained on" the Puritans.[3] Rather than seeing the Puritan interactions with the Indians as signifying something fundamental about the character of their colonization, Miller instead examined the way that the Puritans chose to *interpret* their own struggles with the Indians.[4] As Roy Harvey Pearce has aptly described the Puritan interpretation of the Indian, "The Puritan writer on the Indian was therefore less interested in the Indian's culture than in the fallen spiritual condition which that culture manifested."[5] It was in these *manifestations* that Miller was able to discern the contours of that phenomenon that would occupy him for most of his career, namely "the New England mind."

In an attempt to correct for what now seems an egregious omission, scholars of the colonial period have, during the past two decades, gradually placed the encounter between Europeans and Native Americans at the center of their work.[6] As a result, our understanding of the moment of initial contact and of the subsequent relationship between Europeans and native peoples has evolved dramatically from what it was a generation ago.[7] Although Pearce's groundbreaking study dates back to 1953, it was not until the 1970s that significant numbers of scholars set out to produce sweeping accounts that would alter the very terms in which we understood the colonial period of American history.[8] The nature and scope of this revision cannot adequately be summarized in a few sentences, as it was performed by scholars from a variety of disciplines using an array of sometimes overlapping, sometimes contradictory, methodologies. But it is safe to say that the result of this work was the recognition that the English treatment of the native populations constituted a legitimate and important object of study.[9]

It would be fair to say that most, if not all, of these revisionist histories of the colonial period remain committed to the project of recovering and reconstructing what we might call, for lack of a better word, the "real" terms of the encounter between the English and the Indians. In so proceeding, the revisionists have (sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly) repudiated the providential framework in which Perry Miller and his followers situated their analyses of the colonial period. Such a repudiation seems only reasonable. After all, in the typological framework deployed