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052162908X - Cannibalism and the Colonial World

Edited by Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen

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Cannibalism and the Colonial World

In *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, an international team of specialists from a variety of disciplines – anthropology, literature, art history – discusses the historical and cultural significance of western fascination with the topic of cannibalism. Addressing the image as it appears in a series of texts – popular culture, film, literature, travel writing, and anthropology – the essays range from classical times to contemporary critical discourse. *Cannibalism and the Colonial World* examines western fascination with the figure of the cannibal and how this has impacted on the representation of the non-western world. This collection of literary and anthropological scholars analyses the way cannibalism continues to exist as a term within colonial discourse and places the discussion of cannibalism in the context of postcolonial and cultural studies.

FRANCIS BARKER is Professor in Literature, University of Essex. With Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen he edited *Literature, Politics and Theory* (1986), and *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory* (1994). He is author of *The Tremulous Private Body* (1984) and *The Culture of Violence* (1994)

PETER HULME is Professor in Literature, University of Essex. He is author of *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1897* (1986), and has edited *Wild Majesty: Encounters with Caribs from Columbus to the Present Day* (1992).

MARGARET IVERSEN is Reader in Art History and Theory, University of Essex. She is author of *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (1993).

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The series **Cultural Margins** originated in response to the rapidly increasing interest in postcolonial and minority discourses among literary and humanist scholars in the US, Europe and elsewhere. The aim of the series is to present books which investigate the complex cultural zone within and through which dominant and minority societies interact and negotiate their differences. Studies in the series range from examinations of the debilitating effects of cultural marginalisation, to analyses of the forms of power found at the margins of culture, to books which map the varied and complex components involved in the relations of domination and subversion. This is an international series, addressing questions crucial to the deconstruction and reconstruction of cultural identity in the late twentieth-century world.

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, United Kingdom
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

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First published 1998

Typeset in Palatino 9.5/12pt [CE]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Cannibalism and the colonial world / edited by Francis Barker,
Peter Hulme, Margaret Iversen.

p. cm. – (Cultural margins)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 62118 6 (paperback). – ISBN 0 521 62908 x (paperback)

1. Cannibalism. 2. Cannibalism in literature.

I. Barker, Francis, 1952– . II. Hulme, Peter. III. Iversen, Margaret. IV. Series.

GN409.C35 1998

394'9 – dc21 97-44368 CIP

ISBN 0 521 62118 6 hardback

ISBN 0 521 62908 x paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2004

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Preface

In 1972 André Green opened his long essay in the landmark issue of the *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse* called *Destins du cannibalisme* by remarking on what he called the ‘paradoxe du cannibalisme’: that while anthropophagy was disappearing amongst the cultures which practised it, our culture’s interest in the phenomenon continued to grow (Green 1972: 27). More than two decades later the paradox seems even more acute. ‘Cannibalism’ has continued to disappear, not just in Green’s sense of cannibal barbecues being slowly replaced by McDonald’s franchises even in the most ‘remote’ parts of the world, but also because anthropologists and cultural critics have become – on the whole – more sceptical about the existence of cannibalism as a social practice even in earlier times and in other places. Meanwhile, our interest in the phenomenon seems insatiable, as witnessed by popular films and books, and by a variety of scholarly studies, including the one to which this is the Preface, or *hors d’oeuvre*.

Cannibalism is a topic that unnerves and fascinates. No subject horrifies more than the cannibal serial killer with body parts in his refrigerator, no subject intrigues more than the beneficiary of survival cannibalism; yet cannibalism has proved an endless source of puns and black jokes, and has provoked a lengthy, if intermittent, scholarly debate. Walter Benjamin’s invitation to ‘seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger’ (1992: 247) captures our sense, during discussions in 1992, that the figure of the cannibal, present in popular culture and the language of finance, as well as in anthropological and postcolonial discussions, was worthy of concentrated interdisciplinary and historical attention at one of the Essex Symposia.

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Regularly held since 1989 under the general heading of 'Literature/Politics/Theory', the Essex Symposium series follows on from the Sociology of Literature conferences at Essex, which provided during the 1970s and 1980s an important forum for those interested in left literary and cultural theory in Britain. The Symposium operates by asking around ten invited participants to prepare a draft paper on the announced theme. At the Symposium the pre-circulated papers are discussed in detail. Papers are then rewritten in the light of the discussion, ensuring greater coherence, though not necessarily internal agreement, than a collection of commissioned essays. The Symposium at which early versions of these papers were first discussed took place at the University of Essex in July 1995 under the title 'Consuming Others: "Cannibalism" in the 1990s'. For financial assistance, we thank the University of Essex Research Promotion Fund, and the Departments of Literature and Art History and Theory. For organisational assistance, we thank Elizabeth Weall.

Papers from earlier Essex Symposia have been published as *Uses of History: Marxism, Postmodernism and the Renaissance*, *Postmodernism and the Rereading of Modernity*, *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory* (all in the references under Barker, Francis *et al.*, eds.), and as the first volume of the journal *Studies in Travel Writing*, no. 1 (1997).