

COLONIAL WRITING  
AND THE NEW WORLD

1583–1671

*Allegories of Desire*

THOMAS SCANLAN

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## Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
Introduction	1
1. The allegorical structure of colonial desire	8
2. Fear and love: two versions of Protestant ambivalence	38
3. Forgoing the nation: the Irish problem	68
4. Preaching the nation: the sermon as promotion	93
5. Love and shame: Roger Williams and <i>A Key into the Language of America</i>	123
6. Fear and self-loathing: John Eliot's <i>Indian Dialogues</i>	155
Coda	187
<i>Notes</i>	191
<i>Index</i>	240

## *Illustrations*

*Between pages 58 and 59*

1. "A weroan or great Lorde of Virginia" from Thomas Harriot, *A briefe and true report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, Frankfurt, 1590.
2. "On the cheiff Ladyes of Secota" from Harriot, *A briefe and true report of the New Found Land of Virginia*.
3. "A yonge and gentill woeman daughter of Secota" from Harriot, *A briefe and true report of the New Found Land of Virginia*.
4. "Their seetheynge of their meete in earthen pottes" from Harriot, *A briefe and true report of the New Found Land of Virginia*.
5. "Their sitting at meate" from Harriot, *A briefe and true report of the New Found Land of Virginia*.
6. "The true picture of one picte" from Harriot, *A briefe and true report of the New Found Land of Virginia*.
7. "The true picture of a women picte" from Harriot, *A briefe and true report of the New Found Land of Virginia*.
8. Frontispiece from Theodor DeBry, *Americae Tertia Pars*, Frankfurt, 1592.
9. From Hans Staden, *Historiae Brasilianae*, liber primus, ch. 40, in DeBry, *Americae Tertia Pars*.
10. From Hans Staden, *Historiae Brasilianae*, liber secundus, ch. 29, in DeBry, *Americae Tertia Pars*.
11. From Jean de Léry, *Historia Navigationis in Brasiliam Americae Provinciam*, ch. 9, in DeBry, *Americae Tertia Pars*.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### *The allegorical structure of colonial desire*

When he published his *Brevísima 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 *Brevísima 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 *Brevísima 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 *Brevísima 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 *Brevísima 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.”<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.”<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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

by the Puritans, there were really only two roles available to the Indians. They either functioned as “types” of unregenerate humanity, linked with Satan and Roman Catholicism, or they represented the power of a merciful God to bring about conversion and redemption among the heathens. In either case, the Indians functioned not as independent subjects, but as manifestations of the elect status of the Puritan community in New England. In order to uncover the “real” barbarity and cruelty of the English colonizers, historians have necessarily had to dismantle the interpretive framework that enabled the Puritans to construct the Indians as signifying figures in their own soteriological narratives.

As crucial as this move away from typology has been, it seems to have had the unintended consequence of obscuring the fact that the English men and women who colonized the New World were, in the broadest possible sense, interpretive creatures. It would be a mistake, in other words, to assume that the colonizers’ interpretations only followed along soteriological lines. My goal in this study is to show the central importance of the Indian in other interpretive registers, other than a strictly soteriological one. It will be my aim in the pages ahead to show how the Indian functioned in English Protestant accounts not simply as an instance of unregenerate man – as a device in various soteriological narratives – but also as a crucial figure in the English attempt to generate and sustain a coherent national and religious identity. To put it another way, my goal here is to renew the emphasis on the questions of interpretation that were necessarily rendered so central when typology was all we talked about.

Perhaps the most important lesson to be drawn from the revisions of our accounts of the colonial period is that not all of the desires of the colonists were, strictly speaking, godly. These accounts reveal the limitations of typology – or rather the limitations of any exclusively typological reading of the colonial period. In the pages ahead, I argue for the usefulness of the notion of allegory which, while maintaining the important focus on interpretation, is also a term that is capacious and flexible enough to account for narratives and events that fall outside the narrow confines of typology. This is the case for several reasons, not least of which is the capacity of allegory to narrate desires other than strictly religious ones.



The move toward allegory might at first seem an odd one to make, given the considerable debate that has swirled around the very question of what constitutes the difference between typology and allegory. According to Sacvan Bercovitch, in what probably still stands as the most brilliant reworking of Miller's argument to date, "Typology recommended itself to the Reformers as an ideal method for regulating spiritualization, since it stressed the literal-historical (as opposed to a purely allegorical) level of exegesis, and then proceeded to impose the scriptural pattern upon the self, in accordance with the concept of *exemplum fidei*."<sup>10</sup> While Bercovitch does not deny the prevalence of allegorical writing during the colonial period, he does suggest that reformed Christianity privileged literal, historical typology over what he calls the more "allegorical" forms of writing.<sup>11</sup>

For our purposes, the most important feature of Bercovitch's argument is his recognition that figural interpretations of all sorts abounded during the colonial period. Moreover, as he so convincingly shows, there was a vigorous debate surrounding the question of which kinds of figural interpretations were to be encouraged and which were to be condemned. In any event, as Thomas H. Luxon notes in his study of English Puritan writing, any attempt to justify one method over another proved difficult. "Reformed Christianity," he argues, "for all its insistence on literalism, remains profoundly committed to an allegorical ontology. It is incessantly about the business of othering. It others the world into God's allegory of himself and his kingdom; it others the past as an allegory of the present and the present as an allegory of the future."<sup>12</sup> I do not mean to suggest that the differences between typology and allegory were all semantic, or that any attempt to make a distinction between the two is spurious. But I do mean to suggest that the idea of typology cannot begin to accommodate the considerable body of figurative writing that does not posit a literal connection between the past and the present or, more precisely, a connection between ancient Israel and seventeenth-century Massachusetts. My point here is that Protestants in general, and the English Puritans in specific, were constantly allegorizing everything. They lived in a world, in which every person, object, and event was filled with signifying potential. Accordingly, one of the central claims of this study is that Protestant colonial writings on Indians operated not simply within a

narrow, typological framework, but also within a much more broadly allegorical one – not just within a soteriological context, but within a political one as well.

I should like to make clear at this point what I mean (and what I do not mean) by allegory. Like Angus Fletcher, I adhere to the literal definition of allegory as meaning “other speaking.” I would also embrace his eloquent suggestion that “in the simplest terms, allegory says one thing and means another.”<sup>13</sup> It is important to recognize that such a definition could encompass writings from any number of different genres, and not simply writing that proclaims itself as allegory in the way that, say, Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* or Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* do.<sup>14</sup> For my purposes, allegory does not refer to a particular *genre* of writing but rather to a *mode*, which is of course the word that Fletcher used to define and describe allegory. There is, for our purposes, an obvious reason to reject the idea of allegory as an exclusively literary genre, and that has to do with the fact that none of the texts I will concern myself with in this study are explicitly literary, and so strictly generic (or literary) definitions of allegory are of limited use. More importantly, however, it is important to recognize that to proclaim one’s interest in the “modality” of allegory rather than its “genericness” is implicitly to declare one’s conviction that no discussion of allegory can be complete without a consideration of reception as well as production. Following Fletcher, therefore, I shall be less interested in using the theory of allegory as means of accounting for the genesis of a particular kind of text, and more interested in using it as a way of interpreting texts.<sup>15</sup>

In his insistence on the modal qualities of allegory, Fletcher follows C. S. Lewis’s assertion that it is neither theme nor content that defines allegory, but structure.<sup>16</sup> Such an assertion seems to demand the recognition on our part that many different sorts of texts posit a relationship between themselves and some other, external text – and that text could be constituted as a set of events, as a body of knowledge, or even as an entire system of beliefs. There are, in other words, texts that explicitly declare themselves as allegories and others that, by virtue of their implicitly asserted connection to a context shared by their readers, demand of their readers an act of allegorical interpretation. The object of most of the texts discussed here was to encourage readers to forge just such a connection between a distant colonial scene

and their own immediate circumstances. In the case of England in particular, whose entry into the competition for colonies in the New World was much later than that of its Catholic rivals, the task of generating interest in and commitment to the colonial enterprise was an especially urgent one. The authors of these colonial texts, although they do not explicitly announce their writings as allegories, do require their readers to draw a connection between the two apparently distinct narratives of colonial adventure and national advancement. It is my contention that this interpretive requirement is fundamentally an allegorical one.<sup>17</sup> It will also, therefore, be my contention that the colonial texts we will examine in this study function as “implicit allegories”.

Although he doesn't call them “implicit allegories,” Walter Benjamin makes a similar claim for the reading of Baroque German dramas. In Baroque representations of Golgotha, for instance, Benjamin suggests that we can discern not simply the workings of allegory, but indeed its very essence. In his reflection on Golgotha, Benjamin asserts that allegory presents us with two worlds that seem hopelessly sundered from each other, and it therefore requires what he calls a faithless leap on the part of the reader. The allegorical structure of these representations merely brings the two opposites into a dialectical relation with one another, and the reader does the rest. Allegory, according to Benjamin, is a structure that embodies both a sense of loss and confusion and the possibility of hope and coherence. Or, to put it another way, the essence of allegory, as Benjamin defines it, lies in the demands it places on the reader. Unlike the simplest definitions of literary allegory that posit a one-for-one correspondence between concrete characters, settings, and actions and their “real-life” counterparts, Benjamin's notion of allegory is marked by the uncertainty of the relationship between the signifier and what it might ultimately signify.

As Fredric Jameson has eloquently suggested with respect to Benjamin, “allegory is precisely the dominant mode of expression of a world in which things have been for whatever reason utterly sundered from meanings, from spirit, from genuine human existence.” Jameson goes on to point out that allegory can be useful for more things than simply the Christian project of connecting the incoherence and misery of this world with the harmony and bliss of the next. Allegory becomes “the dominant mode of

expression” in any world where what is hoped for exists at a remove from what is, where the incoherent present is posited against a resolutely coherent future, or where the connection between the present and the past or the present and the future requires a leap of faith. The world from which colonial writing sprung was one marked by social and economic dislocation, religious and political controversy, periodic famine, and devastating world war. It was, in other words, a world marked more by loss than by plenitude. And as such, it was a world ideally suited to the allegorical mode.<sup>18</sup>

For Benjamin, allegory becomes the privileged mode in a world marked by loss, decay, and rupture precisely because of its unique power to embody temporality. Thus it is that Benjamin approves of Friedrich Creuzer’s distinction between symbol and allegory: “The distinction between the two modes is therefore to be sought in the momentariness which allegory lacks. There [in the symbol] we have momentary totality; here [in allegory] we have a progression in a series of moments.”<sup>19</sup> In an attempt to clarify precisely what allegory is and how it functions, Benjamin offers the following helpful analogy:

In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay. Allegory thereby declares itself to be beyond beauty. Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things.<sup>20</sup>

Just as the ruin embodies, in a poignantly concrete way, history, so does allegory embody thought. Both thoughts and things will be subject to “irresistible decay.” The by-product of one process of decay is ruin, of the other, allegory.<sup>21</sup> In a sense, I will be treating the texts I read in this study as ruins. The idea of the ruin is a particularly useful image for dealing with colonial texts. Ruins are objects that cry out for interpretation, but they are not objects whose proper interpretation will ever be located in some definitive notion of authorial intention. This is not to say that intention is irrecoverable, but rather that it is inevitably layered with history.

There is one thing that remains to be said about the indeterminacy of allegory before we turn to a discussion of the specific ways in which allegory lends itself to the narration of colonial desire. In Benjamin’s definition, an allegorist, if such a creature even

existed for him, gestures at a meaning without ever being certain of whether the meaning is even able to be articulated. In other words, both the construction and interpretation of allegory involve more than simple substitution. Since allegory proceeds dialectically, by both preserving things *and* reminding the reader of their fragility and transience, it is a phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a simple equation or translation. I would therefore urge us to resist readings of the colonial period that discover beneath the overtly religious writings of the Puritans a simple and straightforward discourse of conquest. As appealing as the notion of a “manichean allegory” might be – that is, an allegory whose code always renders what is native as inferior and/or evil – Protestant writings about native populations almost always operated according to much subtler and more complicated rules.<sup>22</sup>

Although it is not my intention to provide a psychoanalytic reading of colonial texts *per se*, I should say that parts of my argument strongly suggest connections between allegorical structures of desire and psychoanalytic ones. I am of course not the first scholar to observe that psychoanalytic theory can be used to explain and understand the allegorical mode. Joel Fineman, for instance, has persuasively argued that allegory not only contains an expression of desire – it is itself a structure of desire. According to Fineman, the very structure of allegory holds out the promise either of recovering something that has been lost or of attaining a deferred desire. Allegory’s literal surface, therefore, points to a moment when desire merges with reality. The structure of allegory, in other words, implies a series of crucial separations: the separation of desire from its fulfillment, the separation of the literal from the figurative, the separation of the signifier from the signified. It is precisely because of these separations that allegory manages to contain and portray “continual yearning” and “insatiable desire.”<sup>23</sup>

Fineman’s analysis of allegory builds on the Lacanian notion that desire operates in much the same way as language, where plenitudinous, satisfactory meaning always falls victim to the slippage between the signifier and the signified.<sup>24</sup> It seems to me that this idea offers a useful point of entry into colonial discourse, which is indeed a form of writing that, by its very nature, must always promise more than it can deliver. The Lacanian vocabulary offers us two other useful insights into the workings of colonial

discourse. The first of these, as Jacqueline Rose has suggested in her reading of Lacan, is the notion that desire is always constituted by loss. And the second is to be found in Lacan's profoundly suggestive assertion that "man's desire is the desire of the Other."<sup>25</sup> As Rose has observed, however, these two insights are not easily separable. That is to say, in her reading of Lacan, the desire for the Other is necessarily implicated in narratives of loss.<sup>26</sup> For the purposes of reading colonial texts – or more specifically, colonial texts about native Others – the power of these two interdependent assertions would seem to lie in their ability to offer insight into one of the most prominent features of the texts we will be examining, namely the consistent attempt by colonial writers to narrate the colonial experience as the most readily available means to overcome an almost overwhelming sense of national loss. Moreover, it is through their encounters with the native populations that the English seem to feel that they can articulate an identity that seems always on the verge of disappearing into nothingness.

In a discussion of Franz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* that proceeds along the lines I have been suggesting, Homi Bhabha describes how the process of identification with the Other works to generate an identity for the colonizer. Significantly, what Bhabha calls the "ambivalent identification of the racist world," turns not on the notion of "Self and Other but [on] the otherness of the Self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity." Fanon's work, Bhabha suggests, rather than affirming notions of the Self and Other as static categories, "reveals the deep psychic uncertainty of the colonial relation itself." Ultimately, for Bhabha, "the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, a *self*-fulfilling prophecy – it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image."<sup>27</sup> I take it that Bhabha's intention here is, in part, to foreclose any attempt to describe the colonial relation in crude or reductionist psychoanalytic terms. Rather than suggesting that psychoanalysis can offer scholars a template onto which they can map what he calls "that bizarre figure of desire," Bhabha merely asserts that psychoanalysis can give us a language and a set of tools for coming to terms with the intricate phenomenon of colonial desire – a phenomenon, he insists, whose complexity resides as much within the psyche of the

colonizer himself as it is embodied within the relations between colonizer and colonized. The usefulness of Bhabha's work, for our purposes here, lies in its consistent refusal to suggest that the recovery of the unconscious desires of the colonizers can help us to produce a predictably linear narrative of total suppression and conquest.<sup>28</sup>

Readers will no doubt discern in the pages ahead an affinity, albeit not always explicitly articulated, between the notions of colonial desire I attempt to trace and Bhabha's own work. Just as significantly, readers will detect a reluctance on my part to cast my argument entirely in the idiom of psychoanalysis. This hesitation derives from two sources. First, I have tried at every turn to respect the historical specificity of the early colonial period, which constitutes the subject of this book. Psychoanalytic models, therefore, to the extent that they offer us a vocabulary for describing colonial desire, are useful. Insofar as they posit a transhistorical or transcendent narrative of desire, however, these models would seem to lead us astray. For similar reasons, I would urge us to recognize that the history of the early colonial period cannot be adequately narrated by rendering it in terms that make it appear to be nothing more than an earlier version of the same colonial phenomenon that appeared much later. While one can no doubt discern similarities between the colonial encounters depicted in the writings of say Kipling, Conrad, and Forster and those found in early English colonial narratives, those similarities must, it seems to me, always be narrated within an historical framework that respects the historical differences between the late nineteenth century and the early seventeenth century.

The second reason for my reluctance to embrace psychoanalysis wholeheartedly has to do with the fact that, as I hope will become obvious in a moment, not all the repression on the part of early English colonial writers was a function of unconscious drives. That is to say, the English did indeed seek to repress their desire to subjugate the native populations, or at least to narrate that subjugation as something other than the desire for domination and economic gain. But that repression was largely, if not wholly, due to their *conscious* attempt to fashion a colonial identity that would stand in stark contrast to that of the Spanish. To be sure, the effect of the English determination not to reproduce the rapacity and cruelty of the Spanish, was to generate a colonial ideology

that allowed its adherents to avoid confronting their darker motives. But that is not a story that can be completely or satisfactorily narrated within the discourse of psychoanalysis. It is to that story that we will now turn, as we explore the genesis of the “black legend” and its apparent hold on the English colonial imagination.

## TRANSCENDING MASSACRES

I suggested at the outset that we begin our study of English colonial writing by looking at the English translations of the work of Bartolomé de Las Casas. My interest in Las Casas stems from two features that are readily apparent in the English translations and their editorial apparatus. First, the English publication and dissemination of Las Casas’s text demonstrates the fact that colonial writing could signify something to people who lived outside the immediate context of its initial production. That is, colonial practices and their subsequent narrations could be transformed into allegories. What these early translations show is that Spanish colonization – or, more precisely, the Spanish treatment of the native populations in the colonial setting – could be made to signify something about the Spanish as a nation. Implicit in the English interest in Las Casas, in other words, is the hope that English colonial endeavor could be used to construct a very different narrative of English national identity. The translations of Las Casas, however, do more than simply reveal the allegorical potential of colonial writing. They – and this will constitute my second concern here – in effect articulate a critique of Spanish colonial desire. And, as such, they seem to construct the limits of English colonial desire – or at least the limits of the articulation of that desire.

Before turning, however, to England, I need to say more about the *Brevísima relación* and its author. Born in Seville in 1474, Las Casas was the son of Don Francisco de Las Casas who himself traveled to America with Christopher Columbus in 1493. The son made his first voyage to America in 1502 as a Dominican missionary, and his experiences there convinced him both of the humanity of the native populations and of the injustice of the Spanish treatment of them. He thus became known as a tireless advocate for Indian rights and as a proponent of a colonialism driven not by commercial interests but by the zeal for converting the native



populations to Catholicism. Originally composed in 1542, the *Brevísima relación* was intended to provide support for the so called New Laws enacted in that year to protect Indian rights. Within three years these laws were revoked by the Crown, and Las Casas felt the increasing necessity of making known to the public the atrocities which their fellow Spaniards were committing in the New World.

Although Las Casas is perhaps best known today for his *Historia de las Indias*, the only one of his works published during his lifetime was the *Brevísima relación*. And the publication of this work, which significantly was written in Spanish and not in Latin, sparked a bitter public debate over the goals of colonialism and the status of the native peoples. In this debate, Las Casas attempted to discredit the thinking of opponents, such as Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, who used the Aristotelian concept of natural slavery to justify what might otherwise seem unconscionable behavior. According to Aristotle, a Greek citizen was not allowed to enslave a fellow citizen, but slaves could legally and morally be drawn from other racial and ethnic groups.<sup>29</sup> Thus, following Aristotle's logic, the Spanish were enslaving the native populations of America. In the *Brevísima relación*, Las Casas provides his countrymen with a gruesome, colony-by-colony description of the barbarity of the Spanish explorers. The inventory of atrocities includes, among other horrors, murdering children, impaling pregnant women, and burning people alive, all in the service of a colonial project whose primary aim was to discover gold and other hidden treasure. Whether it be in Hispaniola, Nicaragua, Guatemala, or Cuba, Las Casas relentlessly tells the same story over and over again. Indeed, part of the power of this text is its seemingly endless repetition of the same story with only the names of places changed. In contrast to the cruelty of the Spanish, Las Casas offers numerous examples of the compassion and kindness of the Indians, and thereby he attempts to refute claims that they were not fully human. Thus, in the face of the treachery of the colonizers, the Indians in *Brevísima relación* mourn the deaths of their children and other loved ones and attempt to dissuade their attackers with generosity and kindness.

The *Brevísima relación* was neither anti-colonial nor anti-Catholic. To the contrary, it was intended to shape further Spanish colonial efforts into an expression of Catholic missionary

doctrine. In spite of its origins, however, the *Brevíssima relación* anticipated, in a sense, the tensions that underlay subsequent English colonial activity, tensions between those who saw in colonialism an opportunity for personal gain and others who hoped to transform colonial ventures into harvests of souls. And even more crucially, the *Brevíssima relación* seemed to offer the English a means of resolving those tensions by revealing the implicit potential in the colonial undertaking for articulating a Protestant identity that would in turn help to generate a coherent national identity. In any event, Las Casas would probably have found it strange that his tract was published as a piece of anti-Catholic propaganda some thirty years after it first appeared in Seville. And he would almost certainly have found it remarkable that his text continued to enjoy a readership in England in 1699, almost one-hundred-and-fifty years after its first printing in Spanish.

That a text, which was intended to be an intervention in a specific political debate, could experience such longevity in a context completely outside that of its original composition and dissemination indicates that the issues it confronts are of more than a passing interest. The enduring English distrust and dislike for the Spanish would, in part, account for the periodic rejuvenations of the *Brevíssima relación*, which certainly does not paint a very flattering picture of the Spanish. But there is more at work here than simple national or religious prejudice. The English could only safely reprint Las Casas's text if they felt certain that their own colonial project bore absolutely no resemblance to that of the Spanish. In fact, in the prefaces that accompany the various English editions of the *Brevíssima relación*, one can see the workings of an ideology that would enable the English to distinguish their brand of colonialism from that of other nations, particularly the Spanish.

In the two prefaces that I will examine here one can roughly discern the trajectory of this study, which starts in late Elizabethan England and is particularly concerned with the evolution of colonial ideology in the Civil War and Protectorate period – the mid-seventeenth century – and, passing through the Restoration of the English monarchy, ends in the late seventeenth century with the publication of John Eliot's *Indian Dialogues* in 1671. From its deployment in 1583 as an argument in favor of English intervention in the Low Countries, to its use as a Catholic foil in 1656

against which England's own Protestant colonial operations might be renovated under the auspices of Oliver Cromwell, the *Brevíssima relación* proves itself a remarkably malleable text open to strategic re-interpretation. The popularity, if we may call it that, of the *Brevíssima relación* is, I believe, only partly to be explained by the enduring English hostility toward the Catholics and the Spanish from the late sixteenth through the seventeenth centuries. Although, as I shall suggest in the pages ahead, nascent English colonialism presented itself as a practical and economical means to counter Spanish aggression both in Europe and elsewhere, it also promised to do the cultural work of constructing the Spanish as emblematic figures against whom the English could define their own colonial enterprise as uniquely Protestant.

Expressed another way, one can see in the early English printings of Las Casas the conviction that colonial endeavor could nourish an emerging sense of national and religious identity. In other words, from its earliest stages English colonialism presented itself as a means of achieving geopolitical and economic goals, and as a way of advancing certain religious and ideological causes. In both of these arenas, the Spanish had a role to play. Whether expressed as the foreboding military menace that took the very real shape of the Armada, or as the more subtle threat of a wily Catholicism that sought quietly to subvert an otherwise unsuspecting Protestant culture, the Spanish provided the English with a convenient enemy against whom to fight and against whom to define themselves. Gradually, an English Protestant colonial ideology emerged that, although it privileged religious and spiritual purity, also allowed for the pursuit of economic gain and geopolitical dominance. And a crucial component of that ideology was what the English saw as their uniquely humane and compassionate approach toward the native populations they encountered. In the service of such an ideology, Las Casas's document of the barbarism of the Spanish provided, of course, the ultimate counter-example.

The first English edition of *Brevíssima relación* was entitled *The Spanish Colonie, or briefe chronicle of the acts and gestes of the Spaniards in the West Indies, called the Newe World*, and it was published by William Brome in London in 1583.<sup>30</sup> Wasting no time in unfolding his agenda to the reader in his preface, the editor, who is perhaps Brome himself, hopes that this tract will “serve as a President and warning to the xii Provinces of the lowe Countries.”<sup>31</sup> The context

of this remark is the Elizabethan Dutch Wars, which were urged upon the queen by the so-called Leicester-Walsingham-Sidney faction of her court. This staunchly Protestant coterie advocated an activist and interventionist foreign policy that would keep the aggressive Spanish at bay not just in the Netherlands but elsewhere in the world. In the minds of these royal advisers, the goals of foreign and colonial policy merged in their attempts to thwart Spanish expansion around the globe. But the case of the Low Countries, which were under Spanish control in the 1580s, was a complicated one. Although Elizabeth was not pleased with such a strong Spanish (and Catholic) presence so close to England, she was reluctant to engage in the costly business of fighting a war. And her ambivalence was only heightened by the necessity of having to intervene on behalf of the Protestant faction who had rebelled with the intention of establishing a republic.

The author of the preface to *The Spanish colonie* seems less concerned with the overtly colonial context of the tract he is introducing than he is with its European implications. The prefatory remarks thus continue with an elaboration on the relationship between the Spanish involvement in the New World and their interference in the Low Countries:

But two reasons have moved me to publishe this preface, which I do dedicate to all the provinces of the Lowe countreys: The one, to the end, awaking theselvs [sic] out of their sleep, may begin to thinke upon Gods judgements: and refraine from their wickedness and vice. The other, that they may also consider with what enemie they are to deale, and so to beholde as it were in a picture or table, what stay they are like to be at, when through their rechlessnesse [sic], quarrels, controversies, and partialities themselves have opened the way to such an enemie: and what they may looke for.<sup>32</sup>

The author posits the quite literal possibility that what the Spanish have done to the Indians they are able and willing to do to the Dutch. In so doing, however, he seems to imply that the Dutch, whom he begs to “refraine from their wickednes and vice,” are not completely blameless. Perhaps he is referring to the attempts by the Dutch to overthrow a monarchy and set up a republic, and if so, this was a message that was necessarily to be delivered with delicacy where Elizabeth was concerned. In any case, such a depiction of the Dutch was different from the ways in which Las Casas would construct the Indian victims of the Spanish massacre as completely innocent.

In addition to encouraging the Dutch to take stock of their enemy, the above passage issues a call for unity and solidarity that would continue to inform many Protestant causes, including the colonial one, throughout the next hundred years. And although the preface uses Spanish colonial excesses to make a point that has nothing to do with colonial policy as such, it seems unwittingly to join together two issues that would become inextricably connected in the subsequent colonial adventures of the English, namely the question of the status of native victims and that of English Protestant identity. In fact, the cause of native conversions will emerge, as we shall see in the chapters ahead, as perhaps the one cause that Protestants of all persuasions could wholeheartedly support. And various English colonizers, notably Roger Williams and John Eliot, recognizing the power of the discourse on native peoples, would proceed to portray their own programs as protecting the interests of the native populations, and thereby rendering themselves unassailable.

Although he raises questions about the legitimacy of the Spanish claims to the new world, the editor of *The Spanish colonie* does not encourage the English to contest those claims, at least not militarily. His interests seem limited to the Netherlands. In 1656, however, the *Brevíssima relación* was published again in London under the title of *The Tears of the Indians*, and this time its translator, one J. Phillips, suggests that Las Casas's tract would justify English intervention in the New World.<sup>33</sup> More specifically, Phillips argues that the English have a moral obligation to drive the Spanish from the West Indies. Phillips's prefatory remarks are a subtle piece of work that, on the one hand, extoll the virtues of the past colonial efforts of the English and, on the other, explore the advantages of depriving the Spanish of their colonies in the New World. And if words are not enough, Phillips includes engravings that give visual renditions of the cruelties and tortures that are already graphically described within the tract.<sup>34</sup>

It is possible that Phillips's choice of a title for his translation, echoing as it does John Eliot's *Tears of Repentance*, was intended to call to the readers' minds what was viewed as England's most ambitious and successful attempt to convert the native populations of America. Such a gesture, by juxtaposing a humane Protestant colonial operation to a brutal Catholic one, would give added force to Phillips's argument that England make a move on

the West Indies. In any event, the title seems to play on the widely held perception among the English that Indians never cry, a phenomenon that John Eliot describes.

*Indians* are well known not to bee much subject to teares, no not when they come to feele the sorest torture, or are solemnly brought forth to die; and if the Word workes these teares, surely there is some conquering power of Christ Jesus stirring among them, which what it will end in at last, the Lord best knows.<sup>35</sup>

By the time *The Tears of the Indians* was published, the connection between Las Casas and Eliot had already been established. Eliot's contemporaries, deliberately echoing the sobriquet that had been bestowed upon Las Casas, called Eliot "the Apostle to the Indians."<sup>36</sup> The difference, however, was that Las Casas was perceived as the lone moral voice in a colonial operation unsurpassed in its rapacity. Eliot and his supporters, on the other hand, attempted to depict their work as wholly consistent with a colonial project consumed with the task of performing God's will on earth.

By 1656, the English had been colonizing in North America for more than half a century, and so the publication of *Brevíssima relación* could speak directly to their own colonial experience. Given Cromwell's bloody campaign in Ireland to suppress the rebellious Irish and the Puritans' ruthless prosecution of the war against the Pequots in America, however, Phillips had more than a little rhetorical work to perform in his attempt to distinguish English colonial practices from those of the Spanish. He begins with Ireland in a dedicatory Epistle to Cromwell:

Pardon me, Great Sir, if next my zeal to Heaven, the loud Cry of so many bloody Massacres, far surpassing the Popish Cruelties in *Ireland*, the Honour of my Country, of which You are as tender as of the Apple of Your own eye, hath induced me, out of a constant Affection to your Highness Service, to publish this Relation of the *Spanish Cruelties*; whereby all good men may see and applaud the Justness of your Proceedings: Being confident that God, who hath put this Great Designe into your Hands, will also be pleased to give it a signal Blessing.<sup>37</sup>

Phillips most likely refers in the above passage to the mistreatment of Protestants by the Catholics in Ulster during the 1640s – a situation which Cromwell's expedition to Ireland brutally remedied. The publication of *Brevíssima relación*, therefore, seems intended to do two things. First, it provides justification for

Cromwell's "proceedings" in Ireland by offering demonstrable proof of the lengths to which the Spanish are willing to go in their search for power and wealth. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, the tract shows that Ireland was just the beginning of a much larger conflict against the forces of the anti-Christian papists.

Given the constant Spanish attempts to undermine the English control of Ireland, the Spanish and the Catholic Irish would have been associated in most English readers' minds. And this association is what enables Phillips to draw what might otherwise seem a far-fetched parallel. To suggest that the Protestant settlers in Ulster and the native Irish were the counterparts of the Indians and Spanish respectively would of course contradict geographical, historical, and political logic. And yet, because of the ties between the Spanish and the native Irish, such a parallel would probably have seemed plausible to many English readers. Moreover, as I shall suggest in the subsequent chapters, this trope of Protestant colonists portraying themselves as the righteous victims of Catholic injustice will persist as a means of justifying their own most brutal acts. Phillips himself seems aware of the need to explain away acts and events that might at first seem to incriminate the English.

When our own Case had a small Resemblance of this, how Sensible the People were, and how they mourned at the burning of a poor Village; the usual Accidents, or rather, things to be expected, in a tedious and necessitated War: but had you been Eye-witnesses of the transcending Massacres here related; had you been one of those that lately saw a pleasant Country, now swarming with multitudes of People, but immediately all depopulated, and drown'd in a Deluge of Bloud . . . your Compassion must of necessity have turned into Astonishment: the tears of Men can hardly suffice; these are Enormities to make the Angels mourn. . .<sup>38</sup>

Although Phillips does not specify which "case" of the English it was that resembled the Spanish depopulation of America, there were, by 1656, several examples to chose from. A likely possibility would have been the Puritans' war against the Pequot Indians in New England in 1636–7, which was first brought home to England through a series of eye-witness accounts and then later through colonial histories. In this war, English settlers, under cover of darkness, burned an entire Indian village to the ground and

thereby caused the deaths of hundreds of Indians, including women and children.<sup>39</sup>

Phillips tellingly describes the misdeeds of the Spanish as “*transcending* massacres,” a choice of words that emphasizes the power of colonial narratives to extend beyond their immediate temporal and geographical contexts. Unlike the English slaughter of the native inhabitants, Phillips seems to imply, the Spanish slaughter can signify something fundamental about their identity as a colonizing nation. Indeed, the English response to their own acts of brutality would seem to indicate their implicit deployment of this strategy. Although there was some outcry against the violence from the Puritans themselves, by and large, they regarded the episode precisely as Phillips framed it: one of “the usual Accidents. . . in a tedious and necessitated War.” Rather than allowing his readers to draw what might seem the obvious parallel between the English and Spanish slaughters of Indians, Phillips suggests that they are in fact different: one was “transcendent” while the other was not; one was the unfortunate and inevitable result of a just war, while the other was the product of unmitigated greed and cruelty. This persistence in occupying the moral high ground served to reinforce Phillips’s ultimate goal of convincing Cromwell and the English of the wisdom and efficacy of driving the Spanish from the West Indies.

Should we chase him from his Indian Treasures, he would soon retire to his Shell, like a Snail tapt upon the horns. And perhaps it would not a little avail to the General Peace of Europe, whereby we should be strengthened against the Common Enemy of Christianity. For doubtless it hath been the Satanical Scope of this Tyrant, To set all the European Princes at Variance, and to keep them busie at home, that they might not have leasure to bend their Forces against his Golden Regions.<sup>40</sup>

In suggesting that Spain’s power and influence in Europe could be curtailed by depriving it of its colonial wealth, Phillips was merely articulating explicitly an argument that had been implicit in the writings of Elizabethan colonial theorists, namely that colonies could lend ideological and material support to English attempts to project their national identity onto a world stage.

The re-translation and publication of a tract that, by 1656, was more than one-hundred years old was not simply the gratuitous attempt to justify English colonial aggression by pointing to Spanish atrocities that were almost one-hundred-and-fifty years old.