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Hans Staden. *Hans Staden's True History: An Account of Cannibal Captivity in Brazil.* Edited and translated by Neil L. Whitehead and Michael Harbsmeier. The Cultures and Practices of Violence Series. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. civ + 206 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. $79.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-4213-7; $22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-4231-1.

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Telling the Truth about Brazilian Cannibals

This fine new translation of Hans Staden's *True History*, which describes his two journeys to the New World, his captivity among the Tupinamba Indians of Brazil, and his escape and return home, should help this multilayered and exuberant text finally receive the attention it deserves. Long in the shadow of his French contemporary Jean de Léry, Staden in this translation and in Neil Whitehead's lengthy introduction emerges as a skillful observer: an ethnographer nuanced and meticulous enough to engineer first the postponement and then the cancellation of his slaughter and consumption. Staden's purported position of dependency on native social and religious understandings makes him a unique witness to the early encounter between European adventurers and indigenous inhabitants in Brazil and to the patterns of accommodation and resistance that this encounter produced on both sides.

Staden's account, first published in Marburg in 1557, is divided into two parts. The first part is the story of, as the original table of contents announced, "The two sea voyages, which Hans Staden undertook in nine and a half years," "How Hans Staden served as an arquebusier [for the King of Portugal]," "How he was finally captured … by the enemy, and was under constant threat of being killed and devoured by them … ," and finally, "How God delivered this captive in merciful and wonderful manner and how he returned home to his beloved fatherland." Narrated in the first person, the fifty-three chapters take readers through the highs and lows of Staden's adventures, as he is shipwrecked, finds a place in the Portuguese enterprise, is unlucky enough to be captured, is unlucky enough to be foiled in escape attempts by unsympathetic Frenchmen, but lucky enough to convince the natives who held him captive that he was too valuable to kill and, eventually, that he should be released. The crude but informative woodcuts, almost certainly composed under Staden's guidance, that illustrate these chapters feature Staden as a figure to pity and admire, but also place him in specific situations mentioned in the text, and therefore comprise a substantial visual catalog of the natives and their material world.

The second part of Staden's *True History*, which opens with the title "What the Voyage by Ship is Like from Portugal to Rio de Jenero," proceeds by theme, covering topics such as "How they prepare their food," "How many women one of them has, and how he deals with them," and "Why enemies eat each other," punctuated with further woodcuts illustrating the objects, rituals, and animals described. Staden's presence among the Tupinamba is occasionally mentioned, as when he notes after describing the cannibal ritual, "I was present and have seen all this" (p. 137). However, in contrast to the first part, the second part focuses on general observations that distance the reader from the means by which Staden claimed to have acquired this information.

The book is prefaced by two forewords: one from Staden that proclaims his story as one of providential grace and almighty protection, and the other from Johannes Dryander, professor of medicine at the local university (Marburg), which seeks in broader terms to lay out the case for the veracity and significance of Staden's book. Staden's *True History* thus presents a rich vein for historians, literature scholars, and anthropologists to mine.

The anthropologist Neil Whitehead, one of the text's editors, devotes part of his introductory essay to situating Staden's account with respect to the Portuguese and French sources on which studies of early colonial Brazil have principally relied, and to comparing the images that accompanied the first edition with the elegant, but al-

tered, engravings used in the subsequent de Bry edition. Most of this ambitious hundred-page introduction, however, addresses cross-cultural themes that appear in Staden's story. Whitehead's interests in cannibalism and violence come particularly to the fore, with discussions of the relationship between bodily destructions and the construction of the social order and between anatomical dissection or Eucharistic devotion and the cannibal act. Using his expertise with the native and modern cultures of South America and the Caribbean, Whitehead also explores the connections between Staden's text, and both the lifeways of indigenous peoples and postcolonial Brazilian culture, particularly the *antrofagista* movement in Brazilian modernism. For Whitehead, this is principally a text about Brazil and for Brazil.

Whitehead's approach yields some insights dazzling in their promise. His readings of the particular logic of Tupinamba language and practices (such as the rituals of transculturation that preceded anthropophagic sacrifice) offer glimpses of a culture whose reconstruction can only serve to enhance our understanding of the human experience. At certain points, as in his discussions of violence and (self) consumption, Whitehead turns the ethnographic insights derived from the study of extra-European cultures back onto European rituals such as public executions. While it is certainly not novel for historians to draw on anthropology in their study of early modern European culture, here the terms of the discussion are set by Whitehead's conceptualization of this "barbarian" world, rather than a "civilized" world that is presumed to be normative. Thus, when he moves from analyzing the Tupinamba understanding of dreams and magic to Staden's understanding of omens and divine providence, Whitehead is not merely suggesting certain parallels between these two cultures; he is inverting the categories of "familiar" and "foreign," so that Tupinamba practices are presented as the standard, to which European practices either conform or do not.

Readers of H-German, however enriched by these new perspectives on this early modern text, will not find much help in situating Staden's *True History* within its original context. Staden's social position, the publishing trade, earlier or contemporaneous travel narratives on territories other than Brazil, and even the doctrinal issues at the root of the debate over cannibalism and the Eucharist are mentioned offhand, or not at all.[1] The introduction does not provide an entry point into the text, but rather a series of meditations on its (particularly anthropological) significance. Even these meditations can be puzzling. The possibilities of Whitehead's intriguing comparison between sixteenth-century representations of cannibals and twenty-first-century representations of terrorists, for example, become obscured through statements such as "like the torn and devoured cannibal body, the figure of the suicide bomber also symbolically dramatizes the identification of our bodies with the body-politic itself" (p. lx). The subsequent sentences explain how contemporary societies envision attacks on their infrastructure through metaphors of bodily vulnerability, but do not elucidate how this view parallels early modern conceptions, nor if and how the figure of the suicide bomber is unique within this symbolic terrain. Using his expertise with the native and modern cultures of South America and the Caribbean, Whitehead also explores the connection of Staden's text to the contemporary phenomena of indigenous lifeways and post-colonial Brazilian culture, particularly the antrofagista movement in Brazilian modernism. While enthusing about the remarkable insights Staden's account provides, Whitehead does not provide readers (especially undergraduates) with the background and methods needed to pursue these insights themselves.

These concerns about questions either unasked or unanswered in the introduction are more than just the frustrations of an early modern German historian (although they are that as well); they also go to the heart of the central assumption of Whitehead's analysis: that Staden's text is an essentially transparent account of his experience. Although claiming that his reliance on "the notion of refraction rather than the more strict idea of reflection … allows for the intrusion of the imagination in a way that need not entail a supposition of falsehood or systematic deception" (p. lxxv), Whitehead does not sift the text or the illustrations for such imaginative (or, as it might be better put, narrative) elements, since the "irreducible element in Staden's *Warhaftige Historia*, which, despite all its other flaws and biases, makes it a unique and valuable source," is that it is "the first-hand view of someone who himself was intended for sacrifice" (p. lvii).To make this claim, Whitehead challenges previous scholars who claim that Staden's account was wholly or largely invented and that textual evidence of the native practice of cannibalism must be discounted entirely.[2] There is an argument to be made here; the dismissal of such accounts as the products of European desires to "Other" the natives feels unpersuasive, given the multiple overlapping accounts, the distinctive details provided about various native practices, and the contemporary ethnographic investigations that have confirmed aspects of the earlier accounts.

Whitehead includes these points, but only on the way to making his much more dubious claim, which rests on

the curious assumption that Staden's account is either faithful in all its particulars or entirely false. That is, if Staden's description of Tupinamba ritual is accurate, then so too must be Staden's tale of how he acquired that information: his captivity, his interactions with his captors, and his feelings must have been as he said they were. "The intimacy implied by Staden's physical captivity and the lurking potential for anthropophagic sacrifice are far more convincing grounds on which to base an ethnographic representation of the Tupi than the ecotourism of Jean de Léry" (p. xciii). This epistemological certainty is sustained only by what Whitehead sees as the parallels between Staden's reports and those of modern ethnographical investigations: "[H]is [Staden's] reflexive narrative of his role in the events from which he derives [a] synthesis are much closer to the kind of ethnographic ambition of providing contingent context to ethnological judgment that marks modern anthropological writing" (p. xxvi). The limited engagement with early modern culture in the introduction is thus again symptomatic, as Whitehead does not believe that understanding early modern culture is necessary to understand the text. Rather, the text on its own makes early modern culture legible.

From the perspective of humanities scholarship, this assertion is not only untenable, but leaves some of the most important and contested questions unexamined. Questions about the nature of "truth" and "experience" have exercised modern scholars, and Staden's text is a bountiful hunting ground for those interested in the construction of claims to authoritative knowledge.[3] Sixteenth-century authors and readers recognized the ideas of evidence and experience, but not as incontrovertible sources of truth. The prefaces of both Staden and Dryander are replete with reassurances: that Staden is not telling tales, that he is not passing along hearsay, and that he is putting the story in print solely as an act of piety. Whitehead interprets such remarks as signs of methodological sophistication, when they might better be interpreted as evidence of anxiety. These remarks also help establish the limits of Staden's narrative, setting out what could and could not be said within the story, particularly given his "unlearned" status. One example–that Staden had incentives to present himself as a "paragon of rectitude" (p. xcvii)–is raised by Whitehead himself, but only as an aside to the equally (but not overridingly) significant point that Staden's sexual inactivity was conceivable within the Tupinambas' practices of captivity. Other elements in the story, such as the heroes and villians, the "false" religious beliefs of the natives on which Staden plays, and the fellow captives whose fate is worse than Staden's, do not receive similar scrutiny. Yet for Staden to have his story believed (and to make sense to him), it had to be crafted as a certain kind of story.

This concern, of course, presupposes a verifiable material and experiential world that Staden was capable only of selectively representing, and it therefore shares with Whitehead the sense that Staden's descriptions of that world can be assessed for their accuracy and completeness. This world may be essential for anthropology, but it is not for literary criticism, and it may also be helpful to see Staden as creating, rather than describing, reality. At the expense of denying a voice to the represented (in this case the indigenous inhabitants), a more sophisticated appreciation of text would focus on the processes of knowledge and identity formation in all their instability, contingency, and multiplicity. In fracturing human experience, it would also destabilize the categories (e.g., violence, family relationships, the body, the experience of captivity) on which Whitehead bases his interpretation of culture. Whitehead implicitly argues for the permanence and transhistorical validity of these categories by referring to Staden's own use of them: "[the value of the *True History*] is evident in the way in which Staden's close observation and reporting of his interactions with the Tupi have proved highly relevant to contemporary anthropological understanding, particularly because of how his account reveals the political and social calculation surrounding the anthropophagic ritual performance" (p. xlv). Such methodological and conceptual durability is noteworthy, but it is worth considering whether it is not the result of contemporary anthropology's genealogy, rather than insight. In other words, Whitehead's approach excludes ethnography from scrutiny.

In using ethnographic techniques to lay open Staden's text, Whitehead has certainly made his case for the richness of the text; a point that these suggestions for further approaches only underscore. Whitehead and Harbsmeier have provided a lucid and readable translation that preserves the choppy rhythm and colloquial feel of the original German without sacrificing accessibility. The reproduction of the original's numerous woodcuts is particularly welcome, as they comprise the first visual record of the Tupinamba in their encounter with Europeans. Hans Staden's *True History* is usefully true and usefully history: it brings readers into a dynamic colonial environment in which the natives are central actors and then tosses violence, disease, religion, narrative strategies, and claims for eyewitness epistemology into the mix. Scholars of early modern Germany and of European colonialism, in addition to scholars of Brazil, now

have a wonderful text with which to explore these and other issues with their students. With this translation, Whitehead and Harbsmeier have significantly advanced the study of the early modern world.

Notes

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[1]. More information on Staden's background and German context can be found in Franz Obermeier's introduction to his edition of the *True History*: Hans Staden, *Warhaftige Historia: Zwei Reisen nach Brasilien (1548-1555)* (Kiel: Westensee Verlag, 2007).

[2]. Most notably, Annerose Menninger, *Die Macht der Augenzeugen: neue Welt und Kannibalen-Mythos, 1492-1600* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1995).

[3]. See, for example, Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 773-797; Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400-1600* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); Barbara J. Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England, 1550-1720* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Andrea Frisch, *The Invention of the Eyewitness: Witnessing and Testimony in Early Modern France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Department of Romance Languages, 2004); and Zweder von Martels, ed., *Travel Fact and Travel Fiction: Studies on Fiction, Literary Tradition, Scholarly Discovery, and Observation in Travel Writing* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).

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