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REVIEWS

America in European Consciousness, 1493–1750. Edited by Karen Ordahl Kupperman. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995. 428 pages. $49.95 cloth; $19.95 paper.

This volume presents twelve of the twenty-five papers delivered in June 1991 at Brown University at a conference on the influence of America on Europe. The conference concentrated on "conscious expression, on intellectual life and articulated forms of culture" (p. x) rather than the economic and demographic changes set in motion by the arrival of Europeans on the new continent. The conference also ignored science on the ground that the size and significance of the subject made it suitable for a later conference of its own. In keeping with the temporal limits established by *European Americana: A Chronological Guide to Works Printed in Europe Relating to the Americas, 1493–1750* (New York, 1980–94), a monumental bibliography in six volumes completed recently at the John Carter Brown Library, the conference, and thus the essays in this book, covered the subject only as far as the middle of the eighteenth century. To have gone beyond would have opened a largely new and far more extensive subject, for, by midcentury, America had come into its own and would soon assume a central place in the consciousness of the West.

Before the advent of the age of revolution, the dynamics were reversed. Europe made America. The new continent was irretrievably transformed by contact and settlement, but, with the

Enlightenment, the lines of influence began to shift. America was, after all, the most modern of places, where modernity would work itself out free of the limits and civilizational accretions that so encumbered the European experience of the same historical process. In a sense, the dream that had long haunted the European mind and psyche had become real.

That dream had two sides, and, although it preceded the contact, it soon became the predominant dual image of America. On the one hand, Europeans yearned for paradise, which might be realized in the New World; on the other, they feared the loss of order and security that life in the wilderness might impose. In neither case were they dealing with the real America. For the first two-and-one-half centuries of European experience with the New World, the dream surely remained overwhelming. Europeans may have traveled outward, seemed to have transcended themselves and all that they touched, but they continued to look inward. One may doubt that this convention changed with the dawn of the Enlightenment. America may have risen as a subject of observation and analysis, but the dream did not die. It persisted as the principal set of conceptions through which America might be explained. When it changed, if it ever did, is another subject.

The issue in this book is the earlier period, the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries, when European cultural arbiters grappled with the intrusion of an entirely new world into their consciousness. For the most part, the authors follow the lead of J.H. Elliott who, some twenty-five years ago, in *The Old World and the New, 1492–1650* (Cambridge, 1970; rev. ed. 1992), laid out the minimalist version of America's influence on Europe. The basic supposition of the minimalists was that all understanding of America had first to be filtered through Europe's ancient vision of itself, which much diminished the possibilities of accuracy, or that America would effect a major European reconceptualization. Instead of transforming Europe, America was incorporated into Europe. Much of this argument was elaborated in a conference held at UCLA in 1975 and published in Fredi Chappelli, ed., *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, 2 vols. (Berkeley, California, 1976). The essays under review continue the discussion.

Perhaps the strongest minimalist case is made by Peter Burke, in a treatment on the effect of the discovery on the writing of world history. With the appearance of America, there can be no doubt

that a new history required a fundamental revision of the European paradigm, but, in fact, little happened. As it turned out, contact was just one of the seminal events of the sixteenth century: the Renaissance, the rupture of Christendom, the invention of printing, and the transformation wrought by the use of gunpowder in war. David Armitage compares the work of Richard Hakluyt in the late sixteenth century with the largely unsung comprehensive history of William Robertson published late in the eighteenth century. Hakluyt much expanded the historical art by careful attention to dating of the events his writers recorded and by adding geography, the "eye of history" to his treatment. But only in the eighteenth century had America so increased in prominence that Robertson could offer a comprehensive account of world history, although he never finished more than a fragment of the work.

In a more general section on the meaning of America for European thinking, Sabine MacCormack examines religion, Roland Greene argues the Petrarchan basis of discovery writings, and David Quint reconsiders Montaigne. America, according to MacCormack, deepened European thinking about the origins of religion. In explaining Indian paganism, European writers assumed that it had begun as had Christianity but had fallen into its current benighted state because of America's isolation. Others argued for a parallel development and a convergence of all religious practice into natural religion. Greene's contention that discovery literature apes Petrarchan forms supports the broader interpretation that virtually all European discussions of America were self-referential. Unfortunately, the writing is so marred by arcane usage (my favorite is "sites of privelege"), vogue words, and the postmodern opacity that seem to distinguish so many literature departments nowadays that it serves more to obscure than to illuminate the subject. David Quint rescues Montaigne from the cultural relativists by showing that, instead of praising the noble savage, he penned a powerful critique of native cannibalism, although Montaigne's principal enemy remains the aristocratic Stoicism of his own country.

In a section on European "aspirations" inspired by America, Luca Codignola treats the problem of conversion of the Indians as seen through the eyes of the Holy See. That these new subjects were human and deserved the church's ministrations seems never to have arisen in Rome. Centralized organization of the effort came in the early seventeenth century with the establish-

ment of the Congregation de Propaganala Fide. But confidence in the church's mission seemed to erode as early successes gave way to the later obduracy of native societies, which led to the imposition of harsher policies. John M. Headley continues the theme of natural religion in a reconsideration of Tommaso Campanella, the sixteenth-century Italian Dominican whose appetite for universality and eschatological expectation was fed by the news from America. The editor of the volume, Karen Ordahl Kupperman, examines the beehive motif in the literature of colonization and concludes that the New World led Englishmen to reconsider the nature of their own society.

Three pieces on the scholarly impulse—Henry Lowood on natural history, Christian F. Feest on Indian artifacts, and Richard C. Simmons on books—describe how absent-minded and haphazard was the European effort to gather, disseminate, and preserve information about America. The new continent never held center stage, nor did it occupy the attention of very many Europeans for extended periods of time.

The volume concludes with a final reflection by Elliott, where the subject began some twenty-five years ago. He continues to think that the "dreams were always more important than the realities" (p. 393), although he concedes that he may have underplayed the interest that many Europeans displayed in America. The quest for a more objective reality came only much later in the intellectual development of Europe. Unfortunately, much current scholarship, perhaps in reaction to the confidence of the past or the increasing complexity of the subject, has fallen into an unwonted skepticism. Sympathy has seemed to displace dispassion and the search for the truth in the scholarly enterprise. Elliott expresses a certain skepticism concerning the ways of the new skeptics, who so often seem to doubt both the existence of truth and the human capacity to know it. He notes quite aptly that they have fallen into the same self-referential box that so limited the vision of Europeans in the age of discovery.

Fortunately, the volume at hand suffers very little from this modern affliction. It has the virtue of informing while it provokes; it is, for the most part, clearly written and impressively edited, a model of bookmaking.

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