COLONIAL AMERICAN LITERATURE: MARVELOUS WONDERS AND THE MEDIEVAL TRADITION IN LUSO-BRAZILIAN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CHRONICLES

Pedro Fonseca*

ABSTRACT

This article presents an interpretative analysis of certain aspects of the medieval literary imaginary and its influence in the tropological formation of the New World chronicles. The approach examines some of the aesthetic and mental motivations of the medieval tradition in the colonial Luso-Brazilian historiographical discourse, principally in regards to some accounts of discoveries and initial occupation of Brazilian lands in America.

Contemporary views on historical discourse in which the empirical tradition is all but abandoned in favor of a more inclusive system of signification challenges the modern critic of history as well as literature to re-visit the narratives of discovery, conquest and colonization in the Americas. These notions outlined and developed by the New Historicists maintain basic assumptions concerning representational time and space in literary discourse. This discipline of "History," they warn, more than just chronology and archaeology, may well be the product not only of an individual narrative posture towards evidence, but also of a collective style forged by non-historical narrative conventions. Such a critique of history reminds us that "The past can never be available to us in pure form, but always in the form of 'representations'" (Selden 1989, p.105). These ideas further suggest that historical periods are not unified entities; uniformity being, in fact, a myth of privileged narrative stance; that the past is not something which confronts us as physical object, but rather something we construct from other texts that focus a particular concern. As Hayden White reminds us in *Tropics of Discourse*: "even in the most chaste discursive prose, texts intended to represent 'things as they are' without rhetorical adorment or poetic imagery, there is always a failure of intention. . . . On

* Ph. D. em Literatura Portuguesa pela University of New Mexico (Albuquerque, NM, USA, 1990). Professor Titular de Literatura Portuguesa da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG).

analysis, every mimesis can be shown to be distorted and can serve, therefore, as an occasion for yet another description of the same phenomenon, one claiming to be more realistic, more 'faithful to facts'" (White 1992, p. 3).

Such notions, therefore, invite us to recover, re-examine, and re-evaluate the European "fictions of factual representation" (White 1992, p. 121) in the New World. These sixteenth and seventeenth century chronicles, diaries, letters, confidential reports, dialogues, and other genres of travel literature, although framed within the formal and sometimes erudite canon of humanist discourse, often made use of rhetorical procedures proper to earlier periods of narrative development. Like the medieval historian before him, the European observer of the New World often injected into his accounts a large dose of fictional material. The newly discovered principles and tools of historical scholarship did not entirely free his imagination from these past notions, as witnessed, for example, in cartography, where newly discovered regions betrayed the earlier fabulous sources. In this respect, the aesthetic concern of these chroniclers are reminiscent of medieval iconography in which the time and space continuum abandons all conventions of realistic closure in exchange for a syntax of multiplicity and difference such as that depicted in the Unicorn Tapestries.

Permeated by this medieval sense of the marvelous, restricted by systematic censorship, and, perhaps more importantly, confronted with the mimetic dilemma of representing a new reality by traditional methods of discourse, the chronicler of the New World often projected onto his register of the American landscape not only the utopian dreams and fantasies of the Middle Ages but also the fears and frustations of a weary Christendon.[1] In this direction, the scholastic and later (especially in the Iberian Peninsula) the neo-scholastic legacy exerted its influence in the New World writing, translating (and ultimately transforming) its discourse into a homologous vision of Christian orthodoxy: a harmonious synthesis articulated by the principles of quantity, form and order; a hierarchical "chain of being," in which cosmic order emanates from above. This aesthetic vision of the Middle Ages invented, as it were, the New World as its influence extended well into Renaissance and even post-Renaissance discourse: "one can say dogmatically that [the Elizabethan world] was still solidly theocentric, and that it was a simplified version of a much more complicated medieval picture" (Tillyard n. d., p. 4).

In this respect, it is ironic that Portugal, first poised in the direction of economic prosperity, would remain "faithful" to the traditional beliefs that would inevitably arrest or curb her progress. And yet it is important to remember that the overseas Portuguese venture, subsidized by the Crown, was a marriage of mercantile interest with chivalric ideals; of the hunt for gold and the salvation of souls often confounded by an underlying purpose: the hunt for souls and salvation through gold. Poppino observes that:

> The success of Portugal in opening the sea lanes to India stemmed not only from the technological advantages and superior naval power it enjoyed as a modern nation in the fifteenth century, but also from the application of medieval concepts that were to give it a foothold in the western Hemisphere. In accord with medieval practice, Portugal sought to establish monopolistic control over what have since been considered international waters, to seek papal sanction for its monopoly, and to resort to arbitration by the papacy when monopoly could not be preserved by force (Poppino 1968, pp. 42-43).

The rhetoric of narrative forms, and especially that of historiography (carefully scrutinized by Church and Crown), accompained this development and, therefore, remained hopelessly restrained. Likewise, Saraiva and Lopes have observed that although Portugal did receive and assimilate the experimental teachings of Renaissance scholarship,

> Como é natural, tal critério de apreciação empírica e prática incide sobre domínios limitados. Por qualquer razão, não se deu em Portugal a generalização e sistematização desta atitude empiricista como método científico ... Assistiremos, pelo contrário, a um renovo da Escolástica. Analogamente, descobertas como a de novas faunas e floras, formas de civilização, etc., não chegaram a transformar pela raiz a mundividência tradicional. Foi pouco a pouco e nas regiões, social e economicamente mais adiantadas da Europa, que tal transformação se operou (Saraiva 1989, p.181).

The same power of tradition is evident in the Portuguese humanist, João de Barros, who as author of the first four *Décadas da Ásia* (1st Década: 1552) explains in his introduction to the historical account that there is nothing to be learned from an "ugly" truth, which is better left "unsaid". The historical intent, subverted here by interest in the mythical configuration of factual discourse, is perhaps best exemplified, however, by the Jesuit Brother, Fernão Mendes Pinto, author of the 1614 *Peregrinação*,

whose veracity in the depiction of the Portuguese venture in the Orient has been questioned not only by scholars but also by the voices of popular culture who playfully ask: "Fernão Men[t]es?," to which the answer is: "Minto!".

In their fervor to transcend the world of ordinary phenomena while searching for moral truth, these New World chroniclers continued the rhetorical strategies and thematic concerns prescribed by authors of medieval chronicles and hagiographies. We may observe in these accounts, for example, an uncritical stance toward empirical data – a consequence of the scholastic orientation of logic and methods of argumentation, favoring deductive reasoning over experience – , a canonical dependency on past authority – that even after the invention of printing perpetuated false notions – , and, of course, the anachronistic vision of history writing not always corrected by the humanistic endeavor. These medieval aspects of historical writing reflected the chroniclers more immediate concern with allegorical phenomena within the dimensions of the sacred. In this respect, Huizinga – in quoting Irenaeus and reminding us that the inhabited world is filled with unspoken signs of divine Truth – notes that "nihil vacuum neque sine signo apud Deum" (Huisinga 1954, p. 202). For his part, Eco observes that this philosophical stance "was a prolongation of the mythopoeic dimension of the Classical period, though elaborated in terms of the new images and values of the Christian ethos" (Eco 1986, p. 53).

It is in this respect that we may observe the proximity of the early American chroniclers of discovery to the world of Romance and, more specifically, to the medieval novels of chivalry in which ideal types populate a fanciful world of magic and make believe. Historiography then, although informed by the cognitive process of "discovery," mythically articulated as a quest in imaginative literature, was still very much under the rhetorical influence of medieval narrative and poetic conventions. This is evident, for example, in João de Barros (1497-1562) who begins his writing career with a chivalric novel: "A par da sua carreira de funcionário, manteve João de Barros uma assídua actividade de homem de letras, iniciada com a *Crónica do Imperador Clarimundo*, 1a. edição 1520, obra oferecida a D. João III, que era grande amador de romances de cavalaria" (Saraiva 1989, p. 283)). In chapter I, book III of that romance – "Em que se contam grandes cousas, que o sábio Fanimor profetizou dos Reis de Portugal, que dele [Clarimundo] haviam de descender, e das tradições, que Tobem de Viapa fez, as quais foram cousa de muitas amizades e alianças"

(Barros 1953, p. 62), we find a description of an island that mirrors the medieval *locus amoenus*. The topos is curiously reminiscent of the edenic islands (and their medieval theological significance) described by Columbus in his 1493 letter to Luís de Santángel:

> E tanto que o sol foi cobrando força contra a humidade, desfez toda a névoa da ilha, ficando desabafada daquelas grossuras, que impediam a vista, que foi para os marinheiros grande prazer, porque viram aquela chapa da ilha onde eles estavam, coberta de mui gracioso arvoredo de aciprestes, cedros e palmas de tanta altura, que pareciam tocar as nuvens. E por meio deles vinha uma graciosa ribeira a se meter no mar, onde as suas águas doces contendiam com as salgadas . . . E nos ramos e flores de que os ventos cobriam aquela fresca ribeira, viram os marinheiros a fertilidade da terra (Barros 1953, p. 62).[2]

These and many other rhetorical conventions and motifs of the late Middle Ages, gathered from the threads of imaginative literature, transformed historiography in the Renaissance into a moral tale, a story that required constant realigning of secular and mythical time and space. This displacement of the conventions of time and space within another value-system of representation is mirrored by the poetic technique most often used during this period of narrative development: metaphysical symbolism. The medieval mind perceived reality symbolically, and the symbolic mode of expression found its most adequate representation in the metaphorical process of Christian allegory. As Erickson observes: "Medieval perception was characterized by an all-inclusive awareness of simultaneous realities. The bounds of reality were bent to embrace – and often to localize – the unseen, and determining all perception was a mutually held world view which found in religious truths the ultimate logic of existence" (Erickson 1976, p. 27). Martins further notes the importance of this ontological process: "o cristianismo, por seu lado, pôs-se a descobrir, nas criaturas, as pegadas de Deus no mundo. Indicou-nos, assim, o sentido comovedor da vasta e hierárquica fraternidade dos seres criados pelo mesmo Pai . . . Uma pergunta cheia de densidade religiosa desprendeu-se, então, dos lábios dos místicos, ao contemplar a Terra maravilhosa: não seriam todas as coisas uma palavra de Deus, uma espécie de evangelho natural? ... Todos os seres escondem o pensamento do Filho de Deus e a criação inteira forma um imenso livro" (Martins 1951, p. 547).

In his attempt to align these two worlds – the sacred and the profane – the medieval historian and his Renaissance counterpart (especially in the Iberian Peninsula) set a pattern of narration in which it became necessary to generalize or "universalize" human incidents, to embrace this symbolic world of "simultaneous realities." If historical accuracy was anagogical; that is, if it were not found in the literal transcription of past events but rather on the highest level of suggested meanings, then it must follow that the concept of historical persuasiveness was a product of the narrator's rhetorical ability to convey a harmonious picture of past (and contemporary) events; teleologically conceived and under the careful watch of authority. In other words, eloquence and the artistic arrangement of chronological and archaeological representations became the measure of the historian's success when unveiling the "true" meaning of his account.

Only reluctantly were some of these conventions transformed in the Renaissance. Both world views, medieval and Renaissance, shared frontiers and were in agreement in so far as they attempted to moralize human experience. The difference seems to lie not in the ethical or philosophical stance (strongly scholastic) but rather in the approach or narrative perspective of these New World historians. While the medieval narrator sought his truth on the connotative level of the allegorical process, never questioning biblical sources, the Renaissance historian, in the guise of the learned scholar, placed more emphasis on the depiction of truth within realistic categories of narration; thus legitimizing the sometimes fictional content of his message.

Even in the face of proven facts, the seventeenth-century Luso-Brazilian chronicler, Ambrósio Fernandes Brandão, author of the *Dialogues of the Great Things of Brazil* (1618)[3], justifies many erroneous claims of the ancient "learned men" while spinning his own marvelous tales of the New World reality. Very often Brandão, not unlike other chroniclers, is forced by experience to contradict the traditional voices of authority but he does so uneasily, with utmost respect and apologetic rhetoric: "Then it seems safe to conclude [notes Alviano] that the ancients erred in saying that the equatorial zone is uninhabitable, but that their error was reasonable; and even today, when we have discovered the contrary of what they maintained, we must excuse them, for their mistake arose from nothing else than lack of acquaintance with this coast [of Brazil] ..." (Brandão 1986, p. 89).

It is interesting to note that the Luso-Brazilian chronicler, although a practical business man, is quick to justify the new reality within the context of his tradition; still inspired by a strong sense of "deductive

rationalism": the *credo ut intelligam* argumentation of the early Church Fathers. We see here that a new reality, the influx of new experiences favored by historical circumstances, did not shatter the medieval synthesis; in fact, in many instances the critical eloquence of humanistic discourse only sharpened and perpetuated the necessity of grasping by reason (*per rationem*) the rationale of scholastic traditional belief. Especially in the Iberian Peninsula the tiresome argumentations of scholasticism were never truly forgotten and there were notable revivals whenever orthodoxy demanded it. Still, the humanistic impetus greatly contributed to the wide dissemination of these historical accounts as well as to other forms of "serious discourse." It would appear, then, that the fantastic content of these sometimes "eyewitness" reports would have been seriously checked, preventing the further development of the fictional modes formely sanctioned by medieval aesthetic canon, but instead we witness the continual entry of fabulous material within the historical journals of these New World historians.

It has often been said that the Portuguese depiction of the American landscape, although not as sober as that of the English, is less hyperbolic that the Spanish registers: "A cultura dos círculos portugueses revela-se pouco permeável à efabulação mítica e à imbricação do fantástico com o real, embora nela apareçam e os descobrimentos vão, no dizer de Frei Gaspar da Cruz a tratar da China e Ásia Central, destruir a maioria das 'abusões'" (Godinho 1990, p. 511). Frei Gaspar, author of the *Tratado das Cousas da China* (1570), adds that "Estas e outras cousas que daquelas partes afirmaram,[4] ficaram fabulosas depois que a Índia se descobriu pelos Portugueses" (Gaspar qtd. in Godinho 1990, p. 79). And yet these chroniclers, for the most part, continued the practices of the early tradition.

Not as credulous as our early American historians, we seriously doubt today whether Columbus *heard* nightingales, *saw* disfigured mermaids, or *observed* men with tails in the island of La Spañola; and we are amused when Brandônio, a fictional persona in Brandão's *Dialogues*, declared having owned a composite creature, a constant interest of medieval bestiaries. But even in the much more sober Anglo-American narrative tradition, we are bemused with John Sparke's allegations concerning the existence of unicorns in Florida or with the abundance of venomous crocodiles or even with the appearance of a three headed serpent with four feet.[5] In the Luso-Brazilian tradition, it is Pero de Magalhães Gândavo – in his *História da Província de Santa Cruz* (1576) who records in chapter IX

– "Do monstro marinho que se matou na Capitania de Sam Vicente, anno 1564" (Gândavo 1980, pp. 119-120) – the first more detailed instance of the "maritime monster," later echoed in numerous acccounts. This "Igpupiara," as the Indians called it, fit perfectly within the Christian world view of the struggle between the forces of good and evil found in classical and biblical lore.[6]

These marvelous sketches embedded in the fabric of historical accounts mirror the persistent appetite of the early chroniclers for the wildly imaginative tales of the past. This is especially true of the fantastic fauna inherited from the pseudo-scientific manuals moralized in the early Christian era, much of which continues to fascinate popular culture even today. It is difficult to trace, with any clear definition, the genealogy of these bestiaries beginning with ancient eastern lore, through the greco-roman tradition and on into the exegetical practices of Judaeo-Christian thought. Some basic texts, however, are evidente in this development: Herodotus, Aristotle (*Historia Animalium*), Pliny, the elder (*Historia Naturalis*), Aelian (*History of the Animals*), Solinus, and others. The prototype of the medieval bestiary, however, is the late antique Greek compilation known as the *Physiologus* (*Naturalist*); the original text, now lost, was probably written in the second century of the Christian era in Alexandria, coincidentally the place where Saint Clement and Origen develop the symbolic mode of Christian exegesis (Martins 1951, p. 548).

It is in the fourth century, however, that clear evidence is found for the latin translation that proved so influential throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. An important and more "serious" source in this development is Saint Isidore's book XII (*De Animalia*) of the seventh-century bestseller known as *Origins* or *Etymologiae*. For his part, Godinho observes that the Bishop's work is "uma das obras chave da cultura medieval" (Godinho 1990, p. 275), and Tillyard agrees that the Bishop of Seville was the "most popular of all medieval encyclopedists" (Tillyard, n. d., p. 101). Later sources such as *The Books of Sir Marco Polo*, Mandevil-le's *Travels*, and other sorts of travel literature continue and elaborate the animal symbolism of the early sources.

To understand this tradition and its impact on the colonial venture in the Americas, it is important first to understand the interconnectedness and hierarchical ordering of the medieval universe in which elements, qualities, seasons, stars, and humors are intertwined in an ordered and necessary balance, evindent not only in the bestiary but also in the ever popular medieval herbals and lapidaries. All of these manuals of early

science, covering the entire scope of the material world (animal, vegetable and mineral), inform the medieval cosmos and are often cross-referenced when searching for divine Truth: "Dans la pierre, la plante et l'animal, on retrouve la révélation" observes Mâle (Mâle qtd. in Martins 1951, p. 547). In his *Etymologie*, for example, Saint Isidore observes that blood taken from the sexual organ of a goat is potent enough to dissolve a diamond – "cuius natura adeo calidissima est ut adamantem lapidem, quem nec ignis, nec ferri domare valet materia, solus huius crour dissolvat" (Isidore 1982, p.58) – while menstrual flow not only prevents germination, but also oxidizes iron and makes dogs mad – "Menstrua supervacuus mulierum sanguis . . . Cuius crouris contactu fruges non germinant, acescunt musta, moriuntur herbae, amittunt arbores fetus, ferrum rubigo corripit, nigrescunt aera. Si qui canes inde ederint, in rabiem efferuntur" (Isidore 1982, p. 36).

It is also interesting that the Bishop of Seville, like Ambrósio Fernandes Brandão, much later, registers a hybrid animal he calls the "tityrus," a blend of sheep and billy-goat; an impossible combination according to modern science. It is coincidentally amusing, furthermore, that Brandão's (i.e., Brandônio's) animal "is excellent eating," thus echoing the Bishop's popular etymology for the word goat, associating the animal with its pleasant taste: "saporis iucundi" (Isidore 1982, p. 58).[7] The medieval menagerie had a special fondness for composite creatures, "blazantly bizarre, monstrous marvels created by using the ... technique of disassembling known animals and reassembling their parts in ways unknown to nature" (Benton 1992, p. 16). According to medieval logic, if it was possible in horticulture (by crafting), why not in the animal kingdom? This logic was carried into the medieval kitchen where in the preparation of "cockentrice ... the chef was instructed to construct a composite culinary creature by sewing the front half of a chicken to the back half of a pig" (Benton 1992, p. 64).

The same teleological framework of the bestiaries informs the pseudo-botanical treatises of medieval medicine known as herbals. In this tradition, Gândavo describes a plant that fascinated most chroniclers: the "sensitiva" (L.. *mimosa pudica*),

> cuja qualidade sabida creio que em toda parte causará grande espanto. ... Quando alguém lhe toca com as mãos, ou com qualquer coisa que seja, naquelle momento se encolhe e murcha de maneira que parece criatura sensitiva que se anoja, e recebe escandalo com aquele tocamento. E depois que assossega, como cousa esquecida do agravo,

> torna logo pouco a pouco a estender-se até ficar outra vez tam robusta e verde como dantes. Esta planta deve ter alguma virtude mui grande, a nós encoberta, cujo effeto nam será pela ventura de menos admiraçam. Porque sabemos de todas as hervas que Deos criou, ter cada huma particular virtude com que fizessem diversas operações naquellas cousas pera cuja utilidade foram criadas e quanto mais esta a que a natureza nisto tanto quiz assinalar dando-lhe hum tam estranho ser e differente de todas as outras (Gândavo 1980, p. 101).

Whenever this plant is examined, it is invariably adorned with symbols that point upwards, beyond the sublunary realms. Even the skeptical Alviano, not always in agreement with Brandônio's depiction of Brazil's grandeur, observes that this mysterious plant is "a marvelous thing and worthy of study" (Brandão 1986, p. 208). Frei Vicente do Salvador, in his *História do Brasil* (1627), concludes that the plant must have some occult quality, similar to the magnet (Salvador 1965, p. 72).

The ethical interest in these New World plants and animals is evident in Gândavo, when at the end of the chapter dedicated to the "monstro marinho," he clearly uncovers his discursive interest: "E assi tambem deve de haver outros muitos monstros de diversos pareceres, que no abismo desse largo e espantoso mar se escondem, de nam menos estranheza e admiraçam; e tudo se pode crer, por dificil que pareça: porque os segredos da natureza nam foram revelados todos ao homem, pera que com razam possa negar, e ter por impossivel as cousas que nam vio, nem de que nunca teve noticia" (Gândavo 1980, p. 120).

Similarly, the medieval lapidaries provided sacred symbols inscribed by Divine Will. Such is the case with the official chronicler of Charles V, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, who in addition to the celebrated (and often anthologized) "griffins" and "monkeys with feathers," appeared in his *Natural History of the Indies* (1535; 1557), resorts to the medieval acceptance of authority in an account of the properties of an emerald. This he does in a manner reminiscent of Alfonso X el Sabio's *Lapidary*, a thirteenth-century treatise on precious and semi-precious gems purpoted to have magical and curative powers. The emerald, observers Oviedo, "refrains the delightful rhythms of the lecherous, restores lost memory, and is potent against ghosts and the devil's deceptions" (Oviedo qtd. in Imbert 1970, pp. 22).

It is in this vein that Brandônio, in his dialogue with Alviano, concedes that although wealth is the main stimulus for the mining of stones, other reasons can be counted: "precious stones delight the heart at the sight

of them, and are a marvelous restorative for melancholy. And they say it is true that if a person wearing an emerald commites an act of sensuality, the emerald will shatter by itself, so much does it love chastity" (Brandão 1986, p. 19).[8] This world view assumes that all of God's creation in the great chain of being, animate and inanimate have "souls," however far down they may be from the source of illumination.

Brandão, although hesitant about the power of tradition and authority in the face of personal observation and experience, is still working within this theological framework. If he sometimes vacilates, it is because he knows the sting of colonial repression: in one of his return visits to Lisbon he was denounced before the Inquisition, by his gardener, for the dangerous practice of reading books ! (Brandão 1986, p. 10). Beyond this, however, and following the dictates of the genre (i.e., promotional literature), his account injects just enough fabulous material to whet the reader's appetite without necessarily destroying the credibility he needs for his immediate purpose, nameley: to encourage immigration and to promote exploitation of the colony's resources.

To accomplish this, however, he must embelish the landscape while connoting traditional images of the Christian ethos. Authority comes face to face with experience when he doubts the existence of the mythical salamander, purported to be engendered by fire: "I hold it . . . to be a thing of fable; surely, if there were salamanders, they ought to be found in the furnaces of Brazil's sugar mills, which always have their fires burning" (Brandão 1986, p. 248). Similarly, "Physiologus said of the lizard which is called the salamander that, if it is put into a fiery furnace or an oven for the baths, the fire will be quenched" (Physiologus 1979, p. 61). In keeping with Christian exegetical procedures, the Naturalist (i.e., the Physiologus) quotes biblical sources to prove this point: "thus everyone who believes in God with all his faith, and endures in good works, will pass through hell-fire and the flame will not touch him. Isaiah the Prophet wrote of this, 'if you walk through fire, the flame shall not consume you' [Is. 43:2]" (Physiologus 1979, p. 61). For his part, Saint Isidore[9] observes that the salamander owes its name to the fact that it is untouched by fire – "Salamandra vocata, quod contra incendia valeat" (Isidore 1982, p. 87) – ommiting in this case the standard folk etymology in which sign and signifier are (sometimes erroneously) identified.[10]

This type of arbitrary analogy, grounded in biblical lore, is the very stuff of the bestiary. It inspires some New World chroniclers's carefully orchestrated use of certain topics such as the fabled pelican, a standard icon

of the bestiaries: "Physiologus says of the pelican that it is an exceeding lover of its young. If the pelican brings forth young and the little ones grow, they take to striking their parents in the face. The parents, however, hitting back kill their young ones and then, moved by compassion, they weep over them for three days, lamenting over those whom they killed. On the third day, their mother strikes her side and spills her own blood over the dead bodies (that is, of the chicks) and the blood itself awakens them from death" (Physiologus 1979, pp. 9-10).

The Christian symbolism in this imagery of atonement is quite evident in Brandão's version; where the reader is invited to make the necessary associations in the following description of the "gurinhatá" bird of Brazil in the *Dialogues*:

> This bird has such a great love for its offspring [says Brandônio] that, to keep them from being stolen, it ordinarily makes the nest near a colony of bees. The bees serve as guardians, so to speak, to the young birds. Since every creature is afraid to get close to the bees because of their sharp sting, the young birds are free from danger. Such love does this bird have for its young that, to get food for them, it goes and throws itself among certain insects, which cling to its flesh. It doesn't dread the bites of the insects, but finds pleasant the pains they cause, which are payment for the assured nourishment obtained in this way for the young birds. The parent feeds the insects to them when they are hungry, and it is only for this reason that the insects are kept so handy (Brandão 1986, p. 250).

But, in case the subtle message be lost to his reader, Brandão's Alviano replies: "No more is written ever of the pelicans to eulogize the love they have for the young" (Brandão 1986, p. 250).[11] Antonello Gerbi, in his *Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic - 1750-1900*, observes that opponents in the controversy about the new land argued endlessly as to which were superior songsters, the Brazilian or the European birds. These confrontations, informed by these medieval modes of argumentation, set the stage for the poetic renditions of the American landscape; antecipating cultural movements such as "ufanismo" in Brazilian literature. It is tempting as well to see here the roots of that Latin American reality we read in the world of Magic Realism.

Such stories met with considerable skepticism even as early as the sixteenth century when sworn testaments were often drawn, but the tales continued to promote the new lands; favored by the rhetorical strategies of

the genre. There are many other instances, of course, that draw from the bestiary tradition in the promotional literature of the New World chroniclers. Brandrão's American bestiary, as well as his poetic versions of the flora and mineral wealth of Brazil, connote a mythical world full of wonder, reflected in the title of his account – *Dialogues of the Great Things of Brazil*. History and ethnography are here colored by the rhetorical strategies and motifs of the Middle Ages to produce an effect of renewal and grandeur.[12]

Brandão's distortion and misuse of fact as well as his dependence on medieval animal lore – in addition to that of the lapidaries and herbals – appears as a deliberate rhetorical strategy. It is a poetic device for his persuasive treatise. But direct influence of the bestiaries on Brandão is less important, in fact, than the author's artistic capacity for generating his own menagerie, reflecting the comprehensive range, inventiveness and design of the earlier compilations. The author, thus creates in his *Dialogues* a distinctive American bestiary; a word of exotic fantasy in which personal observation, traditional symbolism and Indian lore conjure such shange creatures as "weeping birds with no blood at all"; oysters with "a menstrual flow as women have"; alligators, whose glance begets the young inside; the "camurim" fish with brains of stone; butterflies that mysteriously end their journey "by drowing themselves in the waters of the sea"; and the love-sick fish, proving "that in every living thing love can be found" (Brandão 1986, pp. 249-262).

Finally, Brandão's aesthetic vision reflects that of medieval symbolism and reminds us of the words of Scottus Eriúgena (815-877) who:

> gave to the Middle Ages the most fruitful formulation of metaphysical symbolism. For Eriúgena the world was a great theophany, manifesting God through its primordial and eternal causes, and manifesting these causes in its sensuous beauties. 'In my judgement', he wrote, 'there is nothing among visible and corporeal things which does not signify something incorporeal and intelligible.'" (Eriúgena qtd. In: Eco, 1986, pp. 56-7).

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta uma analise interpretativa de certos aspectos do imaginário literário medieval e sua influência na formação tropológica das crônicas do Novo Mundo. A abordagem examina algumas das motivações estéticas e mentais da tradição medieval no

discurso historiográfico luso-brasileiro colonial, principalmente em relação a alguns relatos de descobrimentos e ocupação inicial de terras brasileiras na América.

NOTES

1 For an informed statement on the "messianic millenarism" that motivated the search for "Paradise," see chapter II of Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy* (1991).
2 Curiously, also inspired by the "garden of plaisance" topos, the Englishman Henry Hawks having narrowly escaped the Inquisition in Mexico, reports the location of Paradise with similar motifs to Barros's description: "sitting under a tree, you shall have such sweet smells, with such great content and pleasure, that you shall remember nothing, neither wife nor children, nor have any kind of appetite to eat or drink, the odoriferous smells will be so sweet" (Wright 1966, p. 73). These motifs of fertility betray earlier topics remembered in the fourteenth-century English translations of Bartholomew's (Bartholomues Anglicus) *De Proprietatibus Rerum* and, more specifically, in Ranulf Higden's *Polichronicon*, in which reference is made to "men who live by smell" (MacCann 1952, p. 18).
3 All further quotations from this work will appear as *Dialogues*.
4 More specifically, Godinho is here referring to "pigmeus e grifos, ou dos homens de pé-sombreiro" (Godinho 1990, p. 79).
5 In this respect, highly reminiscent of medieval speculative logic, Sparke in his *The Voyage Made by Master John Hawkins ... Begun in An. Dom. 1564* claims that "it is thought that there are lions and tigers as well as unicorns, lions especially, if it be true that [sic] is said of the enmity between them and the unicorns. For there is no beast but has his enemy, as the cony the polecat; a sheep, the wolf; the elephant, the rhinoceros; and so of other beasts the like; insomuch, that whereas the one is the other cannot be missing" (Sparke qtd. in Wright 1966, p. 43). These arguments, even in the English tradition, were theoretical and deductive; not based on experience.

6 It is interesting here to remember that the mysoginistic tradition of deadly female water creature (e. g., sirens, Leviathan) reminds us of Fernão Cardim's (another Luso-Brazilian chronicler) gendered account of the Igpupiara, in which the female monsters – "parecem mulheres,

têm cabelo comprido, e são muito formosas" – embrace the victim – "apertando-a" –, give the fatal kiss – "beijando-a" – , and finally lament the loss – "e como a sentem morta dão alguns gemidos como de sentimento" (Cardim 1980, p. 50). Again, we are not far from the didactic use of the medieval *exemplum.* Henry Hawks, known to the Spanish as Pero Sanches, describing to Richard Hakluyt in 1572 the wonders of the New Spain, also observes "a monstruous kind of fish [who is] a great devourer of men and cattle [and, like the "monstro marinho"] . . . is wont to sleep upon the dry land many times, and if there come in the mean time any man or beast and wake or disquiet him, he speedeth well if he get from him" (Hawks qtd. in Wright 1966, p. 64). That Hawks should even consider the possibilitity of a "flying serpent" would be truly fantastic, were it not for the the fact that the Englishman is most likely (mis)interpreting an earlier Spanish text; in this case after his prey, observes that "[n]o matter where the man goes it can see him. And it follows him as if flying . . ." (from *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, XI, 4, 3; qtd. in Todorov 1992, pp. 235-36). Sahagún's narrative, taken from an Indian account, presents another aspect deserving attention: to what extent is the texture of the American menagerie enriched by native American perspectives. On the other hand, in keeping with the Isidorian bestiary, we observe that dragons or serpents do *fly* – "Draco maior cunctorum serpentium . . . Qui saepe ab speluncis abstractus fertur in aerem, concitaturque proper eum aer" (Isidore 1992, p. 80) – , this being the tradition that Champlain (1567-1635) apparently follows in his *Brief Discourse* (ca. 1600) dedicated to King Henry IV of France. The illustrations in the Deppe manuscript of "authentic" depictions of things seen in America include a flying dragon. Interesting also, keeping in mind Cardim's description of the deadly embrace, is Saint Isidore's comment about the dragon (or serpent): "Innoxius autem est a venenis, sed ideo huic ad mortem faciendam venena non esse necessaria, quia si quem ligarit occidit" (Isidore 1992, p. 80; i. e., it asphyxiates its victim).

7 These amusing instances of what White has called "species corruption" (White 1992, p. 160) are revealing in the use the New World chroniclers make of medieval bestiary, for it is in these degraded breeds – to include the savage condition of the Amerindian – that the natural order of the medieval cosmos is continually subverted in the New World.

8 The "disease" of promiscuity associated with the demonic world and its cure had already been suggested by the wise king (Alfonso X), who

recommended grinding the emerald and ingesting the powder: "Y tiene otra virtud: que el que la trae consigo, protégele de la enfermedad a que llaman demonio . . . y por esta razón y porque es muy hermosa, ámanla los hombres e mayormente los honrados" (Alfonso X 1983, p. 50).

9 A good account of early sources for the medieval bestiary is to be found in Benton (1992, pp. 68-69) where she notes that Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* is "considered an authoritative guide to natural history" (Bento 1992, p. 69).

10 The marriage of natural philosophy to philology, reflecting the schematic methods of medieval argumentation, is a concept that is elaborated in New World writing. For us, it is amusing to consider Gândavo's and (later) Father António Vieira's linguistic interpretation of why the tupi language lacked the letters F, L, and R: "Alguns vocabulos ha nella de que nam usam senam as femeas, e outros que nam servem senam para os machos: carece de tres letras, convem a saber, nam se acha nela F, nem L, nem R, cousa digna despanto porque assi não têm Fé, nem Lei, nem Rei, e desta maneira vivem desordenadamente sem terem alem disto conta, nem peso, nem medido [sic]" (Gândavo 1980, p. 124). A puzzling affirmation from the author [i.e., Gândavo] of a grammar book – *Regras que Ensinam a Maneira de Escrever e Orthographia da Lingua Portuguesa, com um Dialogo que Adiante se Segue em Defensam da Mesma Lingua* (1574), but as Carvalhão Buéscu observes: "os Gramáticos da Renascença estão ainda muito próximos da interpretação literal da Bíblia e consideram o passo do Génese que se refere à criação de palavras por Adão como um passo de caráter directamente histórico (Buéscu 1987, p. 23). Much earlier, Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela, in his twelfth-century travel journal (*The Oriental Travels*), also uses the triadic statement when he observes that "[t]he Samaritans do not possess the three letters He, Cheth, and Ain; the He of the name of our father Abraham, and they have no glory; the Cheth of the name of our father Isaac, in consequence of which they are devoid of pity; the Ain of the name of Jacob, for they want humility" (Tudela qtd. in Komroff 1928, p. 273). In the indecisive linguistic dilemma of the cultural encounter in the New World, the formula becomes a metaphor not only for the savagery of the silenced Amerindian, but also for the new polemics concerning language origins. Buéscu further explains that "[o] encontro duma multiplicidade de línguas totalmente desconhecidas e indecifráveis, algumas suportadas por sistemas de escrita, outras limitadas a uma fugidia oralidade, põe os

homens do século XVI perante a 'prova' vivencial da ruptura lingüística original. Parece, portanto, significativa a atracção que a vários níveis (e até na representação plástica) exerceu, nesta época de espaços abertos, o mito de Babel, os homens vão tentar exorcizá-la e procurar na instauração de modos de comunicação uma forma de exorcismo" (Buéscu 1983, p. 23). This axiom, yet another metaphor for "otherness" that sanctions colonial repression, is conveniently and faithfully appropriated by many of the New World chroniclers – e.g., Bartolozzi letter of 1502 by Vespucci; André Thevet, *As Singularidades da França Antártica a que Outros Chamam de América* (1557); Christovão Gouvea, *Sumário das Armadas que se Fizeram e Guerras que se Deram na Conquista da Parahyba*; Gabriel Soares de Sousa, *Notícia do Brasil* (1587). Even in the more scholarly accounts of the Jesuit missionaires, the phrase is repeated – e.g. Friar Vicente do Salvador, *História do Brasil* (1627) and Father Simão de Vasconcelos, *Chrónica da Companhia de Jesús* (1663).

11 In an earlier narrative, John Sparke, who had expected unicorns in Florida, observes that "Of the sea-fowl above all other not common in England I noted the pelican, which is feigned to be the lovingest bird that is; which, rather than her young should want, will spare her heart-blood out of her belly." Like Brandão he injects factual data, subtly masking the new American reality with echoes of a European past: "but for all this lovingness [the pelican] is very deformed to behold" (Sparke qtd. in Wright 1966, p. 45).

12 The *locus amoenus* topos appears in the *Dialogues* not only in the blissful allusion to the Elysian fields (Brandão 1986, p. 202), but also in the lyric elaboration of the tapestry-like description of the fertile Brazilian soil: "I shall first of all show you the immense fertility of its fields, and next I shall conjure up a refreshing garden abounding with a diversity of things, and after that I shall lay out an orchard supplied with the various trees bearing superb pomes, and like wise a flower garden with countless flowers and daisies in it" (Brandão 1986, p. 201). The tautology ("flowers and daisies") reinforces the connotations associated with the field daisy, called "in medieval times 'oculus Christi' or eye of Christ [and known to be] the flower to which the Virgin Mary could not be compared" (Freeman 1976, p. 132). This description is an example of Brandão's use of the "millefleurs" technique (in medieval art) transferred to his narrative purpose: it

represents an instance of the author's "syntax of multiplicity and difference" discussed before in this essay.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALFONSO X. *Lapidario* [13th century]. Ed. María Brey Mariño. Madrid: Castalia, 1983.

BARROS, João de. *Crónica do Imperador Clarimundo*. Lisboa: Sá da Costa, 1953.

BENTON, Janetta Rebold. *The Medieval Menagerie: Animals in the Art of the Middle Ages*. New York: Abeville Press, 1992.

BRANDÃO, Ambrósio Fernandes. *Dialogues of the Great Things of Brazil* [1618]. Trans. Frederick Holden Hall, William F. Harrison and Dorothy Winters Welker. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986.

BUÉSCU, Maria Leonor Carvalhão. *Gramáticos Portugueses do Século XVI*. Lisboa: Biblioteca Breve / ICALP, 1978.

_____. *O Estudo das Línguas Exóticas no Século XVI*. Lisboa: Biblioteca Breve / ICALP, 1983.

CARDIM, Fernão. *Do Clima e Terra do Brasil*. In *Tratados da Terra e Gente do Brasil*. Coleção "Reconquista do Brasil", vol. 13. Belo Horizonte: Editora Itatiaia Ltda., 1980.

ECO, Umberto. *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*. Trans. Hugh Bredin. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

ERICKSON, Carolly. *The Medieval Vision: Essays in History and Perception*. New York: Oxford Universty Press, 1976.

FREEMAN, Margaret B. *The Unicorn Tapestries*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1976.

GÂNDAVO, Pero de Magalhães. *História da Província de Santa Cruz* [1576]. In *Tratado da Terra do Brasil - História da Província de Santa Cruz*. Coleção "Reconquista do Brasil", vol. 12. Belo Horizonte: Editora Itatiaia Ltda., 1980.

GERBI, Antonello. *The Dispute in the New World: The History of a Polemic - 1750-1900*. Trans. Jeremy Moyle. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973.

GODINHO, Vitorino Magalhães. *Mito e Mercadoria, Utopia e Prática de Navegar: Séculos XIII-XVIII*. Lisboa: DIFEL, 1990.

HUIZINGA, JOHAN. *The Waning of the Middle Ages*. New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1954.

IMBERT, Enrique Anderson and Eugenio Florit. *Literatura Hispanoamericana*. NewYork: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.
ISIDORE de Sevilla, San. *Etimologías*. Ed. José Oroz Reta and Manuel Casquero. Madrid,1982.
KOMROFF, Manuel. Ed. *Contemporaries of Marco Polo: Consisting of the Travels Records to the Eastern Parts of the World of William of Rubruck [1253-1255]; The Journey of John Pian Carpini [1245-1247]; The Journal of Friar Odoric [1318-1330] & The Oriental Travels of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela [1160-1173*]. New York: Liveright Publications Corp., 1928.
MARTINS, Mário. "Os 'Bestiários' na Nossa Literatura Medieval." In: *Brotéria* 52 (1951): pp. 547-560.
MACCANN, Franklin T. *English Discovery of America to 1585*. New York: King's Crown Press, 1952.
PHYSIOLOGUS. Trans. Michael J. Curley. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979.
POPPINO, Rolie E. *Brazil: The Land and People*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.
SALE, Kirkpatrick. *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy*. New York: Penguin, 1990.
SALVADOR, Vicente, Frei. *História do Brasil - 1500-1624*. Ed. Capistrano de Abreu et al. São Paulo: Edições Melhoramentos, 1965.
SARAIVA, António José and Óscar Lopes. *História da Literatura Portuguesa*. Porto: Porto Editora Ltda., 1989.
SELDEN, Raman. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1989.
TILLYARD, E. M. W. *The Elizabethan World*. New York: Vintage Books, n. d.
TODOROV, Tzvetan. *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*. Trans.Richard Howard. New York: Harper Perennial, 1992.
TUDELA, Rabbi Benjamin of. *The Oriental Travels of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*. In: *Contemporaries of Marco Polo: Consisting of the Travels Records to the Eastern Parts of the World of William of Rubruck [1253-1255]; The Journey of John Pian Carpini [1245-1247]; The Journal of Friar Odoric [1318-1330] & The Oriental Travels of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela [1160-1173*]. Ed. Manuel Komroff. New York: Liveright Publications Corp., 1928.
WHITE, Hayden. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.

WRIGHT, Louis B., ed. *The Elizabethan's America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966.