we have that can claim to make a text speak more than it knows. Within psychoanalysis that speaking is again dependent upon a 'cross-questioning' of the subject (the knowing consciousness rather than the knowing text), so 'the textual unconscious' is just one more metaphor, but it is the one wagered on here: hence the vocabulary of symptom, trace, the unconscious and so on, torn from their analytic context to bolster the scandal of putting texts to the question.[11]

In particular, following Macherey's deployment of the Freudian model, the chapters of this book will work to identify key locations in a text – *cruces*, to extend a conventional term – where the text stutters in its articulation, and which can therefore be used as levers to open out the ideology of colonial discourse, to spread it out, in this text, in an act of explication. The venture, it should be said, is archaeological: no smooth history emerges, but rather a series of fragments which, read speculatively, hint at a story that can never be fully recovered.

1

Columbus and the cannibals

[S]ome strangers had arrived who had gabbled in funny old talk because they made the word for sea feminine and not masculine, they called macaws poll parrots, canoes rafts, harpoons javelins, and when they saw us going out to greet them and swim around their ships they climbed up onto the yardarms and shouted to each other look there how well-formed, of beauteous body and fine face, and thick-haired and almost like horsehair silk, and when they saw that we were painted so as not to get sunburned they got all excited like wet little parrots and shouted look there how they daub themselves gray, and they are the hue of canary birds, not white nor yet black, and what there be of them, and we didn't understand why the hell they were making so much fun of us since we were just as normal as the day our mothers bore us and on the other hand they were all decked out like the jack of clubs in all that heat . . . and we traded everything we had for these red birettas and these strips of glass beads that we hung around our necks to please them, and also for these brass bells that can't be worth more than a penny and for chamberpots and eyeglasses . . . but the trouble was that among the I'll swap you this for that and that for the other a wild motherfucking trade grew up and after a while everybody was swapping his parrots, his tobacco, his wads of chocolate, his iguana eggs, everything God ever created, because they took and gave everything willingly, and they even wanted to trade a velvet doublet for one of us to show off in Europeland.[1]

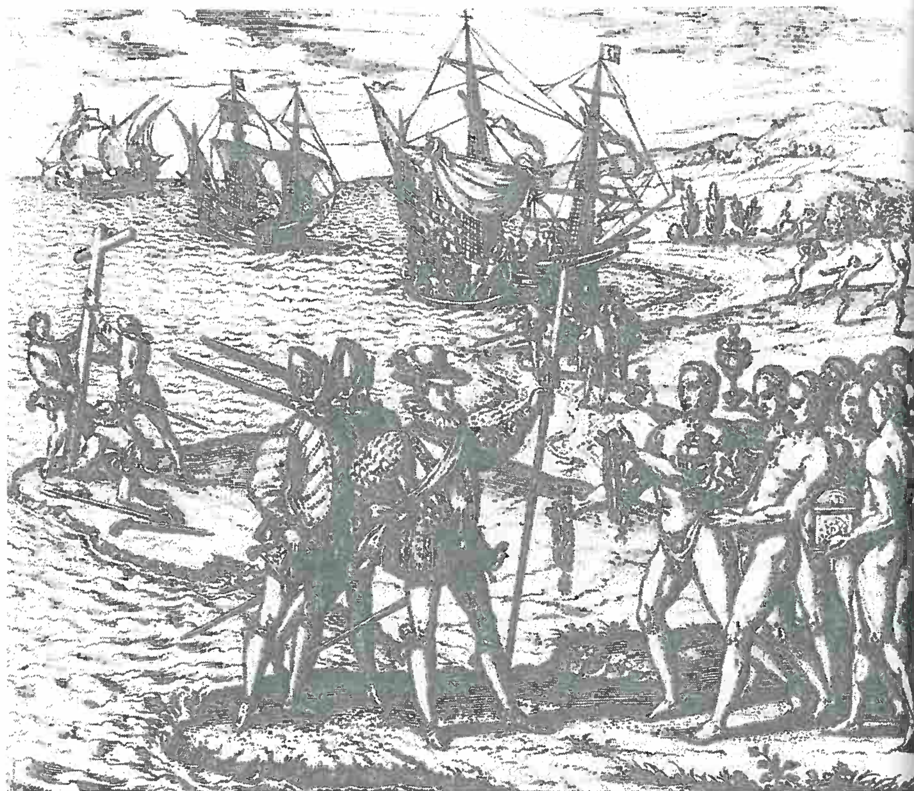

Figure 3 Columbus greeted by native Caribbeans; from Theodore de Bry's *Grands Voyages*. The primal encounter tended to be depicted either as this kind of idealized tribute, or as fierce hostility (cf. Figure 7).

1

Human beings who eat other human beings have always been placed on the very borders of humanity. They are not regarded as *in*human because if they were animals their behaviour would be natural and could not cause the outrage and fear that 'cannibalism' has always provoked. 'Cannibalism': the word comes easily and unproblematically; a straightforward word without troubling ambiguities, more familiar (and easier on the tongue) than the

alternative, 'anthropophagy'. Both words exist in English as nouns describing 'the practice of eating the flesh of one's fellow-creatures', to quote the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s entry on 'cannibalism', but both words once existed as proper nouns referring to whole nations who were to be characterized by their adhesion to such a practice. So, originally, rather than 'cannibalism' or 'anthropophagy', 'Cannibals' and 'Anthropophagi'. But the histories of the two words are very different. 'Anthropophagi' is, in its original Greek, a formation made up of two pre-existing words ('eaters / of human beings') and bestowed by the Greeks on a nation presumed to live beyond the Black Sea. Exactly the opposite applies to 'Cannibals', which was a non-European name used to refer to an existing people – a group of Caribs in the Antilles. Through the connection made between that people and the practice of eating the flesh of their fellow-creatures, the name 'Cannibal' passed into Spanish (and thence to the other European languages) with that implication welded indissolubly to it. Gradually 'cannibal = eater of human flesh' became distinguished from 'Carib = native of the Antilles', a process only completed (in English) by the coining of the general term 'cannibalism', for which the first *OED* entry is dated 1796 – a date that will gather resonance in the final chapter of this book.

One of the ways in which ideologies work is by passing off partial accounts as the whole story. They often achieve this by representing their partiality as what can be taken for granted, 'common sense', 'the natural', even 'reality itself'. This in turn often involves a covering of tracks: if something is to appear as simply 'the case' then its origin in historical contingency must be repressed. Generally speaking this repression can take two forms: the denial of history, of which the most common version is the argument to nature; or the historical alibi, in which a story of origins is told. The power of this second form is that it usually offers a true story, in the restricted but powerful sense of true as 'not false'. It might indeed offer several true stories, but these would never be in conflict because they would be isolated from one another in separate compartments, often called 'disciplines'. Here the most pertinent disciplines are ethnography and historical linguistics, and it is the latter that seems to have provided what will look, at least for a while, like a real beginning, the first encounter.

2

The primary *OED* definition of 'cannibal' reads: 'A man (*esp.* a savage) that eats human flesh; a man-eater, an anthropophagite. Originally proper name of the man-eating Caribs of the Antilles.' The morphology or, to use the *OED*'s word, form-history of 'cannibal' is rather more circumspect.[2] The main part of its entry reads:

(In 16th c. pl. *Canibales*, a. Sp. *Canibales*, originally one of the forms of the ethnic name *Carib* or *Caribes*, a fierce nation of the West Indies, who are recorded to have been *anthropophagi*, and from whom the name was subsequently extended as a descriptive term . . .)

This is a 'true' account of the morphology of the word 'cannibal' in English, yet it is also an ideological account that functions to repress important historical questions about the *use* of the term – its discursive morphology, perhaps, rather than its linguistic morphology. The trace of that repression is the phrase 'who are recorded to have been', which hides beneath its blandness – the passive tense, the absence (in a book of authorities) of any *ultimate* authority, the assumption of impartial and accurate observation – a different history altogether.

The tone of 'who are recorded to have been' suggests a nineteenth-century ethnographer sitting in the shade with notebook and pencil, calmly recording the savage rituals being performed in front of him. However unacceptable that might now seem as 'objective reporting', it still appears a model of simplicity compared with the complexities of the passages that constitute the record in this instance.

On 23 November 1492 Christopher Columbus approached an island 'which those Indians whom he had with him called "Bohio"'. According to Columbus's *Journal* these Indians, usually referred to as Arawaks:

said that this land was very extensive and that in it were people who had one eye in the forehead, and others whom they called 'canibals'. Of these last, they showed great fear, and when they saw that this course was being taken, they were speechless, he says, because these people ate them and because they are very warlike. (*J* 68–9)[3] [la cual decían que era muy grande y que había en ella gente que tenía un ojo en la frente, y otros que se llamaban canibales, a quien mostraban tener gran miedo. Y des que vieron, que lleva este camino, dice que no podían hablar porque los comían y que son gente muy armada.][4]

This is the first appearance of the word 'canibales' in a European text, and it is linked immediately with the practice of eating human flesh. The *Journal* is, therefore, in some sense at least, a 'beginning text'.

But in just what sense is that name and that ascription a 'record' of anything? For a start the actual text on which we presume Columbus to have inscribed that name disappeared, along with its only known copy, in the middle of the sixteenth century. The only version we have, and from which the above quotation is taken, is a handwritten abstract made by Bartolomé de Las Casas, probably in 1552, and probably from the copy of Columbus's original then held in the monastery of San Pablo in Seville. There have subsequently been various transcriptions of Las Casas's manuscript. So the apparent transparency of 'who are recorded to have been' is quickly made opaque by the thickening layers of language: a transcription of an abstract of a copy of a lost original. This is chastening, but to some extent contingent. More telling is what might be called the internal opacity of the statement. Columbus's 'record', far from being an observation that those people called 'canibales' ate other people, is a report of other people's words; moreover, words spoken in a language of which he had no prior knowledge and, at best, six weeks' practice in trying to understand.

Around this passage cluster a whole host of ethnographic and linguistic questions, some of which return in the next chapter. But the general argument here will be that, though important, these questions take second place to the textual and discursive questions. What first needs examination, in other words, are not isolated passages taken as evidence for this or that, but rather the larger units of text and discourse, without which no meaning would be possible at all.

3

To write about the text we call 'el diario de Colón' (Columbus's journal) is to take a leap of faith, to presume that the transcription of the manuscript of the abstract of the copy of the original stands in some kind of meaningful relationship to the historical reality of Columbus's voyage across the Atlantic and down through the Caribbean islands during the winter months of 1492–3.

It would be perverse and unhelpful to presume that no such relationship exists, but credulous and unthinking to speak – as some have done – of the *Journal*'s 'frank words, genuine and unadorned'.[5] Circumspection would certainly seem called for. Yet if the *Journal* is taken not as a privileged eye-witness document of the discovery, nor as an accurate ethnographic record, but rather as the first fable of European beginnings in America, then its complex textual history and slightly dubious status become less important than the incredible narrative it unfolds.

This is not an argument in favour of somehow lifting Columbus and his *Journal* out of history. Just the opposite in fact; and gradually, throughout this chapter, the *Journal*'s contexts will be inscribed on to the text. But it is an argument in favour of bracketing particular questions of historical accuracy and reliability in order to see the text whole, to gauge the structure of its narrative, and to chart the interplay of its linguistic registers and rhetorical modalities. To read the *Journal* in this way is also to defer the biographical questions: the Columbus of whom we speak is for the moment a textual function, the 'I' of the *Journal* who is occasionally, and scandalously, transformed into the third person by the intervention of the transcriber's 'I'.

The *Journal* is generically peculiar. It is in part a log-book, and throughout records the navigational details of Columbus's voyage. Commentators have usually accepted that it was written up almost every evening of the six-and-a-half-month journey, not revised or rewritten, and not constructed with a view to publication. It certainly gives that impression, which is all that matters here: Columbus is presented by the *Journal* as responding day by day to the stimulus of new challenges and problems. Yet if its generic shape is nautical the *Journal* is also by turns a personal memoir, an ethnographic notebook, and a compendium of European fantasies about the Orient: a veritable palimpsest.

4

'From whom the name was subsequently extended as a descriptive term'. Linguistic morphology is concerned only with the connection made between the term 'cannibal' and the practice of eating human flesh. We have seen how the very first mention of that term in a European text is glossed with reference to that practice, and for the linguist it is satisfactory, but not of intrinsic interest, to note how that reference is always present, either implicitly or explicitly, in any recorded use of the word 'cannibal' from Columbus's on 23 November 1492 onwards. It was adopted into the bosom of the European family of languages with a speed and readiness which suggests that there had always been an empty place kept warm for it. Poor 'anthropophagy', if not exactly orphaned, was sent out into the cold until finding belated lodging in the nineteenth century within new disciplines seeking authority from the deployment of classical terminology.

All of which makes it even stranger that the context of that beginning passage immediately puts the association between the word 'cannibal' and the eating of human flesh into doubt. Las Casas continues:

> The admiral says that he well believes that there is something in this, but that since they were well armed, they must be an intelligent people [gente de razón], and he believed that they may have captured some men and that, because they did not return to their own land, they would say that they were eaten. (*J* 69)

This passage is of no interest to linguistic morphology since Columbus's scepticism failed to impinge upon the history of the word. Ethnographically it would probably be of scant interest, showing merely Columbus's initial scepticism, and therefore making him a more reliable witness in the end. Even from the point of view of a revisionist ethnography that wanted to discount suggestions of native anthropophagy the passage could only be seen as evidence of the momentary voice of European reason soon to be deafened by the persistence of Arawak defamations of their traditional enemy. Attention to the discursive complexities of the text will suggest a different reading.

The great paradox of Columbus's *Journal* is that although the voyage of 1492–3 was to have such a devastating and long-lasting

effect on both Europe and America, and is still celebrated as one of the outstanding achievements of humanity, the record itself tells of misunderstandings, failures and disappointments. The greatest of these – that he had not reached Asia – was too overwhelming for Columbus ever to accept. The minor ones are in some ways even more telling.

According to the account given by the *Journal* the Spaniards arrived with a whole series of objectives and expectations, and plied their native hosts with questions. For the most part Columbus gives the impression of fairly straightforward communication with the natives, but this was hardly the case. The Spanish ships carried only one interpreter, Luís de Torres, specially chosen because he spoke Hebrew, Aramaic and some Arabic; so there is no reason to think that there was any initial communication at all. The natives presumably remained baffled but gave (largely by way of signs) what seemed to be the right answers to expedite their visitors – pointing enthusiastic index fingers at the horizon; the Spaniards, pleased to find that whatever they had asked about was so near, thought they were understanding each other famously. On 11 December, three months after the first landfall, Columbus admits: 'Every day we understand these Indians better and they us, although many times there has been misunderstanding' (*J* 93). This is just about credible, even if there is little subsequent indication of improved communication in the months that follow. From October to December (the months at issue here) there is no evidence and no reason to suppose that what Columbus presented as a dialogue between European and native was other than a European monologue: Las Casas has a marginal note by one of the entries under consideration (23 November 1492) commenting on Columbus's misunderstanding of the word 'bohio' (in fact 'house') as the name of an island: 'this shows how little he understood them'.[6] And yet the monologue is in no sense simple or homogeneous: Columbus's initial scepticism is to be explained not as the flickering light of European reason, but rather as the result of a discursive conflict internal to that European monologue itself.

In brief, what a symptomatic reading of the *Journal* reveals is the presence of two distinct discursive networks. In bold outline each discourse can be identified by the presence of key words: in one case 'gold', 'Cathay', 'Grand Khan', 'intelligent soldiers',

'large buildings', 'merchant ships';[7] in the other 'gold', 'savagery', 'monstrosity', 'anthropophagy'. Even more boldly, each discourse can be traced to a single textual origin, Marco Polo and Herodotus respectively. More circumspectly, there is what might be called a discourse of Oriental civilization and a discourse of savagery, both archives of topics and motifs that can be traced back to the classical period. It is tempting to say that the first was based on empirical knowledge and the second on psychic projection, but that would be a false dichotomy. There was no doubt a material reality – the trade that had taken place between Europe and the Far East over many centuries, if intermittently. In pursuit of, or as an outcome of, this trade there were Europeans who travelled to the Far East, but their words are in no way a simple reflection of 'what they saw'. For that reason it is better to speak of identifiable discourses. There was a panoply of words and phrases used to speak about the Orient: most concerned its wealth and power, as well they might since Europe had for many years been sending east large amounts of gold and silver. Marco Polo's account was the best-known deployment of these topoi.[8] The discourse of savagery had in fact changed little since Herodotus's 'investigation' of Greece's 'barbarian' neighbours. The locations moved but the descriptions of Amazons, Anthropophagi and Cynocephali remained constant throughout Ctesias, Pliny, Solinus and many others.[9] This discourse was hegemonic in the sense that it provided a popular vocabulary for constituting 'otherness' and was not dependent on *textual* reproduction. Textual authority was however available to Columbus in Pierre d'Ailly and Aeneas Sylvius, and indeed in the text that we know as 'Marco Polo', but which is properly *Divisament dou Monde*, authored by a writer of romances in French, and itself already an unravellable discursive network.[10]

In the early weeks of the Columbian voyage it is possible to see a certain jockeying for position between these two discourses, but no overt conflict. The relationship between them is expressed as that between present and future: this is a world of savagery, over there we will find Cathay. But there are two potential sites of conflict, one conscious – in the sense of being present in the text; the other unconscious – in the sense that it is present only in its absence and must be reconstructed from the traces it leaves. The conscious conflict is that two elements, 'the soldiers of the Grand

Khan' from the discourse of Marco Polo and 'the man-eating savages' from the discourse of Herodotus, are competing for a single signifier – the word 'canibales'. Columbus's wavering on 23 November belongs to a larger pattern of references in which 'canibal' is consistently glossed by his native hosts as 'man-eater' while it ineluctably calls to his mind 'el Gran Can'. In various entries the phonemes echo each other from several lines' distance until on 11 December 1492 they finally coincide:

> it appears likely that they are harassed by an intelligent race, all these islands living in great fear of those of Caniba. 'And so I repeat what I have said on other occasions,' he says, 'the Caniba are nothing else than the people of the Grand Khan [*que Caniba no es otra cosa sino la gente del Gran Can*], who must be very near here and possess ships, and they must come to take them captive, and as the prisoners do not return, they believe that they have been eaten.' (*J* 92–3)

The two 'Can' are identified as one, the crucial identification is backdated, and 'canibal' as man-eater must simply disppear having no reference to attach itself to.

Except of course that it does not disappear at all. That would be too easy. In fact the assertion of the identity of 'Caniba' with 'gente del Can', so far from marking the victory of the Oriental discourse, signals its very defeat; as if the crucial phonetic evidence could only be brought to textual presence once its power to control action had faded. To understand this it will be necessary to look back in some detail at the course of Columbus's voyage through the Caribbean (see Figure 4).

5

Gold was not simply the one element common to both the Oriental discourse and the discourse of savagery; it was in each case the pivotal term around which the others clustered. Oriental gold and savage gold would prove to be very different animals but in the early weeks of the voyage they happily share the single signifier which guided Columbus like a magnet through the bewildering archipelago of the Bahamian islands:

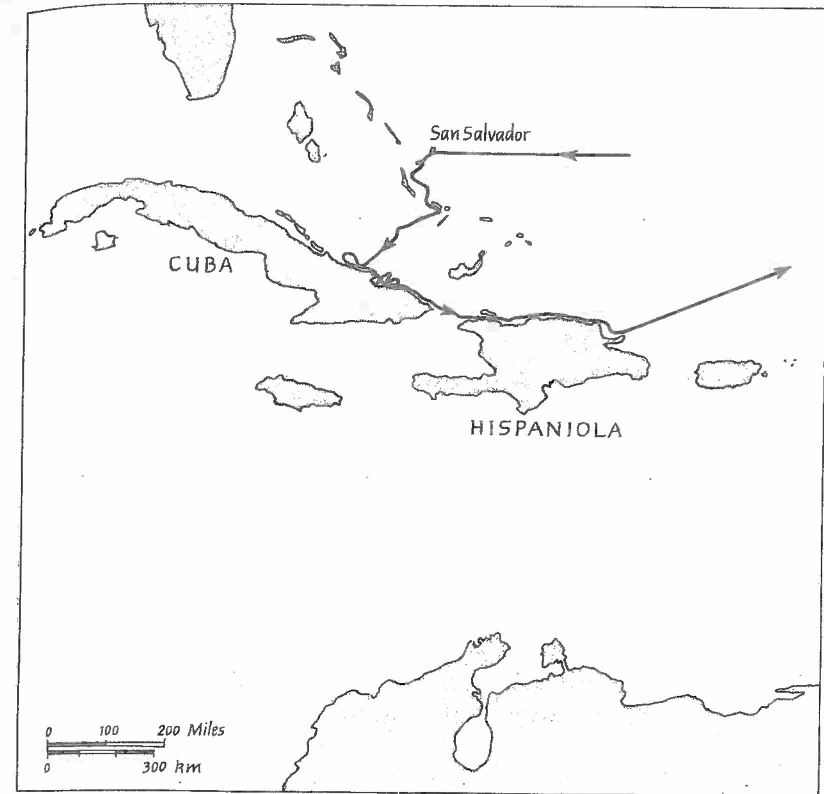

Figure 4 Columbus's route through the Caribbean, 1492–3.

> MONDAY, OCTOBER 15TH ... These islands are very green and fertile and the breezes are very soft, and it is possible that there are in them many things, of which I do not know, because I did not wish to delay in finding gold, by discovering and going about many islands. (*J* 30)

> TUESDAY, OCTOBER 23RD ... I did not delay longer here ... since I see that there is no gold mine .... I say that it is not right to delay, but to go on our way and to discover much land, until a very profitable land is reached. (*J* 42)[11]

Gold was the object of desire but 'gold' could be articulated by both discourses. What is more, at this stage both discourses pointed

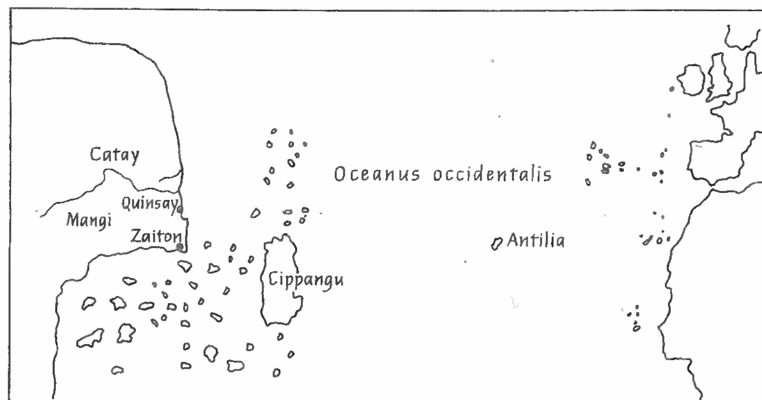

Figure 5 Columbus's probable conception of eastern Asia, based on a reconstruction of the chart drawn for the King of Portugal by Paolo Toscanelli, with whom Columbus corresponded.

in the same direction. According to the medieval geography of Oriental discourse the coastline of Cathay ran from NNW to SSE, and the large island of Cipangu (Japan) had to its north-east a cluster of smaller islands (see Figure 5). So the initial landfall on Guanahani was not problematic; it was clearly one of these smaller islands. A course south-west would take him to Cipangu or, if he missed Cipangu, to the coast of Cathay. As it happened the native fingers pointed south-west too, no doubt for their own reasons,[12] but serving to buttress the traditional link between the sources of gold and the tropics:

> WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 21ST .. From this heat, which the admiral says that he experienced there, he argued that in these Indies and there where he was, there must be much gold. (*J* 68)

On 21 October Columbus first hears of Cuba:

> I wish to leave for another very large island, which I believe must be Cipangu, according to the signs which these Indians whom I have with me make; they call it 'Colba'. They say that there are ships and many very good sailors there .... But I am still determined to proceed to the mainland and to the city of Quinsay and to give the letters of Your Highnesses to the Grand Khan, and to request a reply and return with it. (*J* 41)

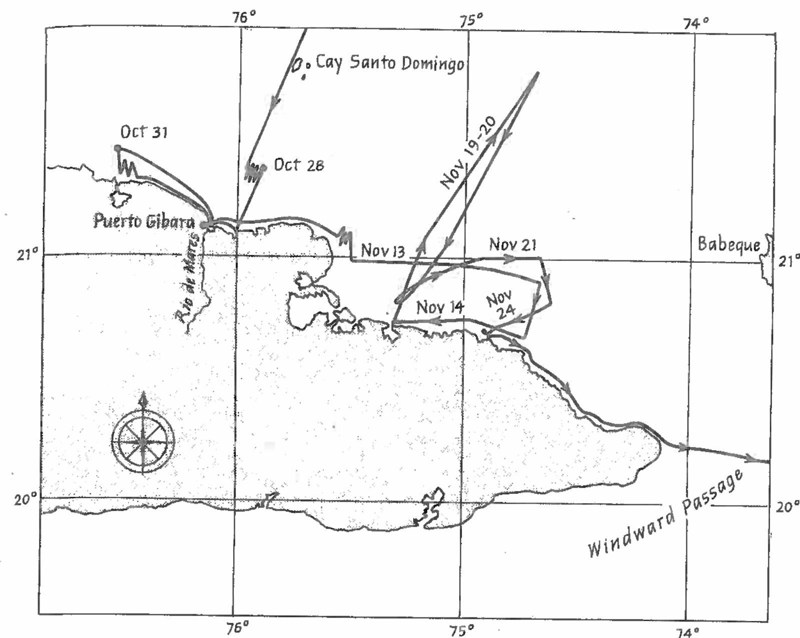

Figure 6 Columbus's course off eastern Cuba, showing his change of direction.

The determination is still to go beyond the island to the mainland. They steered west-south-west and reached Cuba on 28 October:

> The Indians said that in that island there are gold mines and pearls; the admiral saw that the place was suited for them. And the admiral understood that the ships of the Grand Khan come there, and they are large; and that from there to the mainland it is ten days' journey. (*J* 46).

Columbus immediately sets off north-west up the Cuban coast, but his geographical notions quickly lose their assurance (see Figure 6). This is not one of the smaller islands but neither, evidently, is it the rich and civilized island of Cipangu:

> TUESDAY, OCTOBER 30TH ... After having gone fifteen leagues, the Indians who were in the caravel *Pinta* said that behind that cape there was a river, and that from the river to Cuba it was four days' journey. The captain of the *Pinta* said he understood that this Cuba was a city, and that land was a very extensive

mainland which stretched far to the north, and that the king of that land was at war with the Grand Khan . . . . The admiral resolved to go to that river and send a present to the king of that land, and send him the letter of the Sovereigns . . . ; and he says that he must attempt to go to the Grand Khan, for he thought that he was in the neighbourhood, or to the city of Cathay, which belongs to the Grand Khan, which, as he says, is very large, as he was told before he set out from Spain. (*J* 49)

The refusal of the Caribbean islands to conform to 'Oriental' expectations is by now becoming embarrassingly evident. Yet Martín Alonso Pinzón's interpretation of his guides' remarks offers a way out. If Cuba is a *city* then this must be the mainland and Quinsay not too far to the north (given that it supposedly has the same latitude as the Canaries). There then follows an extraordinary series of events, which will be given in outline before being discussed in detail.

Columbus begins by saying, quite reasonably since he now imagines himself to be on the mainland, 'that he must attempt to go to the Grand Khan'; yet in the same sentence he announces that he is 42° north of the Equator, an evidently ludicrous assessment of his position. The next day he makes one desultory effort to sail north-west:

> WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 31ST All night, Tuesday, he was beating about, and he saw a river where he could not enter because the mouth was shallow . . . . And navigating farther on, he found a cape which jutted very far out and was surrounded by shallows, and he saw an inlet or bay, where small vessels might enter, and he could not make it, because the wind had shifted due north and all the coast ran north-north-west and south-east. Another cape which he saw jutted still farther out. For this reason and because the sky showed that it would blow hard, he had to return to the Río de Mares. (*J* 49)

The next day he potters around on shore but announces firmly '"that this is the mainland, and that I am," he says, "before Zaiton and Quinsay, a hundred leagues, a little more or less, distant from one and another"' (*J* 51). Amazingly, the next day, rather than sailing north-west again, he sends his embassy inland. Cuba, he had discovered after all, was only four days' inland from the river, but not *this* river (Río de Mares), rather the one north-west beyond the cape. The ambassadors are primed in all seriousness and dispatched; Columbus takes his latitude again, this time with a quadrant, and again comes out with 42° north. He then spends four days waiting for the embassy to return, trying all the while to communicate with the natives:

> SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4TH . . . The admiral showed to some Indians of that place cinnamon and pepper – I suppose some of that which he had brought from Castile as a specimen – and they recognised it, as he says, and indicated by signs that there was much of it near there, towards the south-east. He showed them gold and pearls, and certain old men replied that in a place which they called 'Bohio' there was a vast amount, and that they wore it round the neck and on the ears and legs, and also pearls. He further understood that they said that there were large ships and merchandise, and that all this was to the south-east. He also understood that far from there were men with one eye, and others with dogs' noses who ate men, and that when they took a man, they cut off his head and drank his blood and castrated him. The admiral determined to return to the ship to await the two men whom he had sent, intending himself to go in search of those lands if they did not bring some good news of things they sought. (*J* 52)[13]

The following night (November 5/6) the men return having found no Oriental city. Columbus relates their story and then makes a statement. Las Casas, catching the portentous tone, quotes the words directly:

> 'They are,' says the admiral, 'a people very free from wickedness and unwarlike; they are all naked, men and women, as their mothers bore them. It is true that the women wear only a piece of cotton, large enough to cover their privy parts and no more, and they are of very good appearance, and are not very black, less so than those of the Canaries. I hold, most Serene Princes,' the admiral says here, 'that having devout religious persons, knowing their language, they would all at once become Christians, and so I hope in our Lord that Your Highnesses will take action in this matter with great diligence, in order to turn to the Church such great peoples and to convert them, as you have destroyed those who would not confess the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, and after

your days, for we are all mortal, you will leave your realms in a most tranquil state and free from heresy and wickedness, and you will be well received before the eternal Creator, Whom may it please to give you long life and great increase of many kingdoms and lordships, and the will and inclination to spread the holy Christian religion, as you have done up to this time. Amen. Today I refloated the ship and I am preparing to set out on Thursday in the name of God, and to go to the south-east to seek for gold and spices and to discover land.' (*J* 57)

In six days an absolute determination to sail north-west has been transformed into an equally absolute determination on the rectitude of sailing in precisely the opposite direction.

The crucial nature of this decision for Columbus can be gauged by the almost manic accumulation of explanations he offers for it. In addition to the *Journal* entry, he gives over a large chunk of his later *Letter* – addressed to the Spanish monarchs but the document through which the 'discovery' became known to all Europe – to a justification of the change:

> When I came to Juana [Cuba], I followed its coast to the westward, and I found it to be so extensive that I thought it must be the mainland, the province of Cathay. And since there were neither towns nor villages on the seashore, but small hamlets only, with the people of which I could not have speech because they all fled immediately, I went forward on the same course, thinking that I could not fail to find great cities or towns. At the end of many leagues, seeing that there was no change and that the coast was bearing me northwards, which I wished to avoid, since winter was already approaching and I proposed to make from it to the south, and as, moreover, the wind was carrying me forward, I determined not to wait for a change in the weather and retraced my path as far as a remarkable harbour known to me. (*J* 191–2).

It should be noted that 'many leagues' was in fact two days' sailing, and that the rest of the *Letter* is almost totally devoid of navigational detail. Carl Sauer points out the illogical nature of Columbus's reversal:

> Columbus made too many excuses for not continuing to the land of the Great Khan, whose seaports lay at ten days' sail or at a hundred leagues. Coastline, wind, and current all led west. A purely local change of coast to the north was construed into a continuing change of direction. The passage of cool northern air for several days he interpreted as the arrival of winter cold, although he wrote at the same time about his delight in the tropical verdure. A brief change in wind became the adversity of head winds out of the north.[14]

The wanton dispatch of the embassy into the Cuban interior has also provoked much comment. Las Casas speculated that when Columbus produced a gold object the natives pronounced the word 'Cubanacán' (mid-Cuba) – a district where a limited quantity of gold existed – and pointed up river to the interior; Columbus, of course, immediately connected Cubanacán with 'el Gran Can'.[15] Alternatively, Morison suggests that the natives 'simply mistook the Spaniards' dumb-show of imperial majesty for a desire to meet their cacique'.[16] In the event Luís de Torres was entrusted with the Latin passport, the Latin letter of credence from Ferdinand and Isabella, and a royal gift. As the Arabic speaker of the expedition he was supposed to make direct contact with the Grand Khan. All of this proved superfluous. The party travelled 25 miles up the valley of the Cacoyuguin where they found, not even a walled city, let along Quinsay (Hangchow), at that time the biggest city in the world, but a village of fifty houses. They were treated with deference but saw no signs of the civilization they expected.

But the most interesting (and most problematic) piece of evidence concerns Columbus's ridiculously inaccurate assessment of his position. Las Casas was clearly sceptical when reporting the 30 October reading: 'In the opinion of the admiral, he was distant from the equinoctial line forty-two degrees to the north, if the text from which I have copied this is not corrupt' (*J* 49); but the figure is twice confirmed: on 2 November when Columbus takes the latitude with a quadrant, and on 21 November, by which time an element of doubt has crept in ('it was . . . his opinion that he was not so far distant' (*J* 67)). Puerto Gibara, on the estuary of Columbus's Río de Mares, is in fact 21°06' north. Having plotted a course due west from the Canaries and then sailed south-west through the Bahamas, Columbus must have known that he could not have been more than 25° or 26° north even allowing for some

error in navigation. The reasons for this seemingly inexplicable mistake have much exercised the commentators; arguably it is the most disputed textual crux in the whole Columbian corpus. One commentator has postulated an imaginary quadrant that read double. Another has argued that Columbus was trying to throw the Portuguese off the track. Las Casas suggested that the scribe copied 21 as 42 – an unlikely error, particularly on three separate occasions. Morison believed he had found the explanation:

> The real explanation is simple: Columbus picked the wrong star. He was 'shooting' Alfirk (β Cephei), which in November bore due north at dusk; mistaking her for Polaris, whose familiar 'pointers' were below the horizon.[17]

But a description of what happened is not an explanation. A simple error, twice repeated, seems unlikely for such an experienced navigator in calm and relatively clear weather.[18] But if the *desire* is to sail south-east then the 42° north would certainly provide a good excuse since Quinsay and Zaiton could not possibly lie that far north, and Marco Polo could therefore be appeased. This of course is the one reason Columbus does *not* offer for his change of direction, although it would on the surface be the most convincing. This seems to indicate that the positional error was not the *reason* for Columbus's alteration of course, but rather a *post hoc* justification to himself for that alteration. It could not be a fabrication: Columbus's conscious mind must have known perfectly well that it was wrong, and anyway such an inconsistently held fabrication could have convinced nobody. Rather Columbus wanted to sail south-east instead of the obvious north-west (obvious, that is, if he were seeking the Grand Khan's cities), and the faulty latitude reading enabled him to convince himself that he was taking the correct and logical course. Once the decision was irrevocable he could voice his own doubts and put the mistake down to a faulty quadrant (*J* 67).

These pages of the *Journal* offer, then, a series of traces that mark the site of a discursive conflict. The commentators have been exercised by these traces but handicapped by attempting to interpret them as a series of individual problems (an accident here, a change of mind there), and, more seriously, as an unmediated reflection of Columbus's mental processes.

A reading of the whole discursive conflict might look like this.

In simple terms the traces mark the defeat of the Oriental discourse as the articulating principle of the *Journal*. Until 29 October 1492 Columbus had, at least to his own satisfaction, been able to get positive enough answers to his Marco Polo-based questions to operate that interpretative grid. More to the point, the directions indicated by Marco Polo coincided with where both Columbus's received notions and native fingers pointed towards gold. On the coast of Cuba Columbus immediately, without hesitation and without comment, sailed north-west before, in this flurry of explanations, strange manoeuvres and nonsensical assessments of position, changing direction. The basic point, as Sauer recognized, is that when the terrain made a south-westerly course no longer possible and forced a choice between north-west and south-east, Columbus chose south-east because he was more likely to find gold in that direction: not of course the gold of Cathay, but exploitable mines of 'savage gold'. This was not just a difficult decision, it was one that could not be brought to textual consciousness, for to do so would have been to admit that the whole discursive structure of the Columbian enterprise had been in vain. As a result the text has to be studded with convincing reasons for the decision to sail south-east but, like Freud's example of the neighbour who fails to return the borrowed kettle, Columbus gives just *too* many. The meteorological points are adequately covered by Sauer's comment: they enable the text to *suggest* that moving northwards in winter (on the coast of Cuba!) might be unwise, but they need firmer support. This is provided by the unconsciously deliberate mistaking of Alfirk for Polaris.

In this light the embassy can be seen not so much as a genuine attempt to locate an Oriental court as Columbus furnishing himself with a decisive piece of empirical proof as to the absence of Oriental courts. Nobody had even suggested there were any courts inland from the Río de Mares – the earlier news had been of a city inland from a more westerly river; there was no reason at all for supposing there were any large cities to be found. But by creating the sense of expectation and therefore subsequent disappointment the text can produce, as it were, a smokescreen behind which the direction of Columbus's departure will not seem of significance. In other words the embassy was sent with such excessive solemnity *in order that it return a failure*. The incident is given

extensive coverage in the *Journal*. The *Letter* can afford to be laconic:

> I sent two men inland to learn if there were a king or great cities. They travelled three days' journey, finding an infinity of small hamlets and people without number, but nothing of importance. For this reason they returned. (*J* 192)

The departure of the embassy creates a space of four days that prove to be the still centre of the *Journal*. The relentless forward momentum of the enterprise is halted. Time is almost suspended. These are the pages of the *Journal* richest in description of the natural world. It is the first European idyll in the tropics. Textually, too, a space has been opened up into which the Herodotean discourse can unfold itself, particularly (since this is what concerns us most here) its darker side, because it is while the embassy is away, while, as it were, the Oriental discourse is occupied elsewhere, that we read for the first time of 'men with one eye, and others with dogs' noses who eat men' (*J* 52): deployment of the standard Mediterranean teratology.

Again it is no accident that at the end of this idyll (in fact as a way of announcing the end of it) Columbus presents his most important policy statement so far, quoted in direct speech by Las Casas. It begins as an argument for the natural goodness of the Antillean natives ('very free from wickedness and unwarlike . . . naked . . . not very black'); trusts that Ferdinand and Isabella will be well received by their Creator for having converted so many pagans (trying to salvage at least something from the goldless and spiceless and Khanless month since the first landfall); prays for the life and empire of his sovereigns; and only then can say what the last four days and innumerable words have been building up to:

> Today I refloated the ship and I am preparing to set out on Thursday in the name of God, and to go to the south-east to seek for gold and spices and to discover land. (*J* 57)

These words were written on Tuesday 6 November. The entry ends on a note of unparalleled bathos:

> All these are the words of the admiral, who thought to set out on the Thursday, but, as he had a contrary wind, he was not able to set out until the twelfth day of November. (*J* 57)

So much for the onset of the northerly winds of winter. There are no more entries at all until the wind changes.

6

During this period of stasis on the coast of Cuba the Oriental discourse is displaced as the articulating principle of the Columbian text by the Herodotean discourse of savagery. The far-reaching nature of this displacement, evident only in the textual upheavals, is disguised to some extent by the continuity apparently given by the signifier common (and indeed pivotal) to both discourses: 'gold'. But the shift can in the end be charted by the gradual displacement of the metonyms of Oriental gold by those of savage gold. In October Columbus was hearing of 'a king who had large vessels of it and possessed much gold' (*J* 26), of 'very large golden bracelets on the legs and arms' (*J* 29), and of 'bracelets on their arms and on their legs, and in their ears and noses and around their necks' (*J* 30). After October this becomes natives digging gold (*J* 58), or sieving and smelting it (*J* 107), or collecting grains as large as lentils (*J* 142), as large as grains of wheat (*J* 140), or larger than beans (*J* 140). (One can note a displaced concern with sustenance in the language.) As a result Quinsay is no longer mentioned as a destination; the Grand Khan and his merchant ships make occasional appearances still, but only at moments where there is no danger of empirical contradiction. Displaced as an articulating discourse, Oriental terminology remains only as vestigial.

The shift in the dominant signified of 'gold' is, it should be emphasized, determinant. One of its effects is to determine the outcome of the struggle over the signifier 'canibal', but an immediate resolution could hardly be expected in so fraught a text. The glossing of 'canibal' as 'soldier of the Khan' fights a rearguard but essentially diversionary action (23 November), and the phonetic equivalence, its most powerful weapon though not brought into play until 11 December, is in essence a Parthian shot, a gesture as empty as the Cuban embassy. There is nothing now to prevent the 'canibales' assuming their role as man-eating savages. On 26 December, just fifteen days after the supposedly 'decisive' phonetic connection, Columbus promises the destruc-

tion of the 'people of Caniba' without it now appearing worthy of mention that they may be the soldiers of a civilized potentate.

7

This then, in considerable but necessary detail, is the discursive morphology of the word 'canibal', demonstrating just how it becomes attached to that 'meaning' of 'man-eating savages', a process which, although in constant response to the events of Columbus's voyage through the Caribbean islands and to his interchange with their native inhabitants, has nothing at all to do with simple observation or record. The 'historical principles' of the *Oxford English Dictionary* serve here to occlude history.

But this kind of 'internal' analysis can never be purely formal or autonomous in the sense of being generated solely by the level of the textual operations that are laid bare. Any political reading must interpret the narrower textual conflict in terms of larger politico-narrative units – must see it, in Medvedev's word, as an ideologeme, whose significance only becomes apparent in the larger context. But neither does this imply giving explanatory priority to that broader level. The interplay should be dialectical.[19]

For particular purposes the focus here has been fixedly on the level of vocabulary; but one of the wider issues must also be broached, since it will prove to be a theme of some importance in almost all the succeeding chapters. Over the last five centuries many of the intellectual and political debates about America have centred on the question of how to approach its 'novelty': whether the categories of the Old World are sufficient to contain the New World within them, or whether that novelty needs recognizing by the formulation of 'new', more appropriate categories. Similar debates have taken place within natural history, archaeology, political theory and many other areas, always haunted by the impossibility of inventing purely 'new' categories, and by the radical difficulties in understanding the indigenous American categories on their own terms.

Within the terrain of colonial discourse the problems have always been slightly different to the extent that novelty, as will be seen in Chapter 3, has played a limited and very particular role, while the main thrust has always been to relate America to the established norms of the Old World. This tendency has several aspects of which the legal was probably the most crucial since it was obviously important that America should be subsumed under the *jus gentium* used to establish European rights to possession of land. Imaginatively, too, it was probably understandable that points of comparison and contact should be sought with the experience of the Old World, but here the relevant discourses have tended to be those which already dealt with worlds other than Europe. As the European nations, especially England, took on their imperial roles, the classical world of the Mediterranean grew in importance as a repository of the images and analogies by which those nations could represent to themselves their colonial activities. Much, as we will see in Chapter 6, turns on an unlikely comparison between St Vincent and Carthage. The court party in *The Tempest* and Robinson Crusoe both follow – or are taken on – triangular courses, from Europe to Africa to America, as if in part to facilitate this discursive transference that will help manage the fearful novelty of the New World.

Of course this Mediterranean discourse (conjoining the classical and the Biblical) had not stood still since classical times, even though, since one of its purposes is to stereotype otherness, the discourse does not often have an openly historical dimension. The threat from Islam was obviously a factor, although it does not impinge significantly on the story here. And we have already seen how the classical image of the Orient was, though not contradicted, given a significant new input of detail and imagery by the western travellers who had taken advantage of the Tartar peace (1241–1368).

The large historical irony, though, whose consequences Columbus never escaped, was that however fantastic the teratologies of classical discourse, however wonderful the riches of Cathay, however much, in a word, we read these discourses as telling more of the collective fantasies of Europe than of the cultures of the Nubians, the Scythians or the Tartars, the products of the Far East did reach Europe: the spice trade was material evidence that could not be gainsaid.

For centuries Genoa and Venice had been competing in the import of Oriental products. The routes from the East were long

and difficult, the middlemen many. During the Tartar peace the prospect was opened, briefly but tantalizingly, of a more direct commerce that would lower prices and raise profits. A Genoese expedition had attempted the western circumnavigation as early as 1291.[20] The fall of Constantinople (1453) and tight Turkish control of the Middle Eastern trade routes made that task more vital. Columbus himself was deeply implicated in the Genoese commercial network: Cipolla calls him quite simply the 'agent of Genoese capital'; his chief supporters and financial backers were certainly Genoese.[21] But this search was – as a commercial enterprise – doomed to failure. For one thing it was based on a profound ignorance of Asia: no one in Europe knew that the Mongols had been expelled from China by the Ming dynasty in 1368. For another, European supplies of gold, the traditional payment for eastern spices, had been almost exhausted.[22] China had always scorned even the best European merchandise; Columbus with a ship full of cheap baubles was hardly likely to make much impression on Chinese entrepreneurs. It was obvious, at least in retrospect, that Europe needed either sufficient arms to force an entry into Eastern trade, or an alternative source of gold to ensure the continuity of the traditional exchange. Portugal managed for a while to follow both these options at the same time, diverting at least part of the ancient trans-Saharan gold trade away from the North African coast towards the Lower Guinea coast, while forcing a violent entry into the East Indian spice trade.[23] Spain, having had to forswear a share of the African trade, had little option but to pursue the western route, either, as the Genoese wanted, to find a direct sea route to Asia, or, as the Castilian pattern suggested, to follow through the acquisition of land and natural resources in the Atlantic; after all medieval geography populated the Ocean Sea with plenty of land, some of it gold-bearing.[24]

The discourses which conflict within the text of the *Journal* are therefore imbricated with, and not finally comprehensible apart from, these commercial concerns. Oriental discourse was the only available language in which the project of Genoese commerce could find its articulation. The Herodotean discourse of savagery which, in however refracted a way, deals with issues of disputed land and fractious indigenes, was appropriate to an emergent Castilian expansionism which had already begun its westward

translation with the conquest of the Canary Islands and their native Guanches, probably a more significant precedent to their American adventure than the less clearcut relationship with Andalusian Islam.[25]

Columbus's change of direction on the Cuban coast can therefore be seen in this broader perspective as, if not the end then at least the beginning of the end of a particular Genoese dream. The last straw would come with Sebastian Cabot's abortive 1525 voyage which confirmed that Spain had lost too much ground to the Portuguese to be able to compete for the trade of the East.[26] The Genoese had to content themselves with controlling Spanish trade with the New World and developing their finance capitalism into the complex web that entangled the Spanish monarchy. Fernand Braudel has seen all this as a defensive action on the part of the Mediterranean world to hold off what, after the event, can be seen as the inevitable rise of the Atlantic economies, with the consequent move northwards of the pivot of European capitalism.

To some extent all this rephrases a very old and vexed question concerning Columbus's 'motive'. The vexation comes at least in part because of the difficulty of finding concrete evidence for something as tenuous as 'motive'. Nevertheless, it could be that the position outlined here would reconcile some traditionally antagonistic views. The Columbus of the *Journal* and the *Letter* 'believed' he had reached Asia. But Henry Vignaud and Cecil Jane were making valid observations in suggesting, respectively, that 'those Islands and Mainlands which . . . shall be discovered or acquired in the said Ocean Seas' (the formula of the Capitulations agreed between Columbus and the Catholic monarchs)[27] is an odd way of referring to the Cipangu and Cathay of Marco Polo, and that it would have been 'an entirely fatuous undertaking' to send practically unarmed vessels to take control of a powerful and reputedly friendly kingdom.[28] Totally fanciful, though, are the hypotheses that Vignaud and Jane construct regarding Columbus's 'real motive' of reaching unknown lands, with their subsequent need to denounce the authenticity of the correspondence with Toscanelli and even to question Columbus's ability to read at all in 1492.[29] But many of these differences can be defused if the language of the Capitulations is seen as necessarily ambiguous, precisely to embody two different sets of

possibilities that came into a tenuous and ultimately tortuous compromise. 'Compromise' is not in fact the right word: it sounds too deliberate and in any case implies a third position between two incompatible ones. The difficulty is again that of having to use words against their intentionalist grain. 'Ambiguous' is wrong too, if unavoidable, since it is a question of variable referents rather than variable signifieds: 'Islands and mainlands' could refer, within Orientalist discourse, to China and Japan; but it could also refer to whatever might be discovered, Antilia perhaps, or another cluster of islands like the Azores. Perhaps it could be said, paraphrasing Nietzsche, that the whole point of language, particularly the language of legal agreements, is that it enables you *not* to specify what you mean, so that the two sets of commercial assumptions and the two discourses associated with them could happily, for a while anyway, share the same signifiers. It was in the end a question of a form of words which temporarily allowed two incompatible positions to proceed as if they were not incompatible.

To say more than this would be to enter the murky waters of psychological speculation. It would hardly be over-bold, in the light of supporting textual evidence, to suggest that Columbus 'had in mind' China and Japan, while Ferdinand and Isabella were more concerned with the possibility of finding other Atlantic islands. But any statements of intentionality – that Columbus framed the Capitulations to allow that very compromise, or that Ferdinand and Isabella deliberately took advantage of Columbus's obsession to embark on a gamble by which they had little to lose and possibly much to gain – remain purely hypothetical.[30]

It is difficult too, but proper, to resist the single step that separates the unconscious textual processes analysed here from the unconscious processes of its author – 'Columbus' the character produced by the text from the 'real' Columbus. At the heart of my explanation of how 'canibal' came to take on the 'meaning' that it has since borne in the major European languages is the suggestion that the discourse of savage gold – the discourse that articulates Castilian expansionism – is in the last analysis the controlling motor of the *Journal* despite the fact that the enterprise had been initiated and framed within the discursive parameters of Genoese commerce. It is easy for us to see why that had to happen and why therefore, in part, the *Journal* is such a fraught text: the crossing of such a large expanse of unknown ocean could only

ever have been accomplished by someone convinced, if for entirely the wrong reasons, that he was going to find land as relatively quickly as Columbus did – quickly, that is, bearing in mind the actual distance of the Asian coastline from the western coast of Europe. Such an achievement could *only* be based on a profound misapprehension of the nature of the enterprise. And yet, while all the evidence suggests that Columbus remained convinced to the end of his life that he had achieved what he set out to achieve, it has been argued here that the *Journal*, unconsciously, is articulated by a quite radically incompatible principle. It would be easy, but meaningless, to talk of Columbus's 'unconscious motives', of an unconscious internalizing of Castilian values:[31] such motives are forever out of reach. Yet the textual analysis finds its support in a strange place. Discursively the Columbian enterprise is seemingly a product of the Genoese dream of an Oriental trade but, although that discourse finally flounders on the 'northerly-inclining' coast of Cuba, the enterprise has, unrevealed to the text, been carrying the seeds of its own destruction within it, literally within it, since what kind of trade with the great and powerful Khan of Cathay could be carried out on the basis of the few chests of baubles kept in the holds of the three ships – 'these brass bells that can't be worth more than a penny'?

The baubles offer themselves for interpretation. As an embodiment of the new economic order of colonialism growing within the husk of medieval commerce. As a sign that Columbus really 'knew' that the Genoese dream was a fantasy. But perhaps they should just be seen as a mark of the growing power of the new European states, leaving Columbus – the 'Columbus' of the *Journal* – as the index of a discursive transformation whose consequences will be traced in the chapters that follow.

8

Columbus's last anchorage of the first voyage was on the northern coast of Hispaniola at a harbour just east of a point still called Las Flechas (The Arrows):

> SUNDAY, JANUARY 13TH ... He sent the boat to land at a beautiful beach, in order that they might take *ajes* to eat, and

> they found some men with bows and arrows, with whom they paused to talk, and they bought two bows and many arrows, and asked one of them to go to speak with the admiral in the caravel, and he came. The admiral says that he was more ugly in appearance than any whom he had seen. He had his face all stained with charcoal, although in all other parts they are accustomed to paint themselves with various colours; he wore all his hair long and drawn back and tied behind, and then gathered in meshes of parrots' feathers, and he was as naked as the others. The admiral judged that he must be one of the Caribs who eat men [*que debía ser de los caribes que comen los hombres*]. (*J* 146)

This is the first of many descriptions of 'cannibals' that will be quoted in this book. Modern ethnography is of the opinion that the man was not a Carib, but rather a Ciguayo Arawak, a small group separated culturally and linguistically from the Taino Arawak with whom Columbus had had most contact.[32] But irrespective of who the native *really* was (and this is one of the issues considered in the next chapter) what is of most interest is the process whereby Columbus arrives at his attribution. The man is a native American but uglier in appearance than the natives already encountered. 'Ugly in appearance' is glossed in such a way as to make it clear that what is being referred to is not intrinsic physical characteristics but rather extrinsic cultural features. From these alone – charcoal stain and parrots' feathers – Columbus 'judges' that the native is a man-eating Carib.

The encounter then follows the classic pattern. Columbus asks about gold, the native points east towards the next island in the chain, Borinquen (Puerto Rico): 'The Indians told him that in that land there was much gold, and pointing to the poop of the caravel, which was very large, said that there were pieces of that size' (*J* 146). If one could postulate a direct correlation between the natives' desire to see the back of the Spaniards and the size of the gold nuggets to be found on the next island then the Ciguayos were *very* keen to be left alone. This would be confirmed by the fact that the first skirmish between Spaniards and Amerindians followed directly upon this exchange, occasioned (according to the report received by Columbus, who was not among the landing party) by a Ciguayo attack on seven Spaniards during a trading session:

> Afterwards the Christians returned to the caravel with their boat, and when the admiral learned of it, he said that on the one hand he was sorry, and on the other hand not, since they would be afraid of the Christians, for without doubt, he says, the people there are, he says, evil-doers, and he believed that they were those from Carib and that they eat men. (*J* 148)

The soldiers of the Grand Khan are no longer even worth a mention. 'Carib' could not exactly be said to *mean* 'anthropophagous' as yet, but it is very clearly a place, and the most prominent characteristic of its inhabitants – indeed the only one worth mentioning at all – is that 'they eat men'. Once again this process takes place in a discursive vacuum at some distance from what it purports to refer to. There is no evidence that these people are 'caribes' or 'canibales' other than Columbus's unsupported supposition; there is no evidence at all that they eat men. Two things have changed. The words 'carib' or 'canibal' are now being used consistently with the ever-present and unqualified gloss 'those who eat men'. And those whom the Spaniards consider as 'caribes' have demonstrated a capacity for resistance.

Gold now lies to the east: to the east are the lands of Carib. What more could Columbus want?: to find gold and to confirm the teratology of Herodotus at one and the same time. On Tuesday 15 January 1493 he seems to hesitate: the island of the 'caribes' is difficult to visit 'because that people is said to eat human flesh' (*J* 150). On Wednesday the nettle is grasped: 'He set out from the gulf . . . to go, as he says, to the island of Carib' (*J* 152). But the wind blew stronger than his determination and the course was set for Spain. The *Journal* is a wonderfully rich and strange text but nothing in it can compete with the final irony that desire and fear, gold and cannibal, are left in monstrous conjunction on an *unvisited* island.

9

Before its rediscovery in 1791 only a handful of people had read Columbus's *Journal*; many thousands however had read the letter, written on the homeward voyage, in which Columbus summarized and simplified the complexities of the longer document. Dated 15 February 1493, the *Letter* was given wide publicity. The

original was printed in Barcelona in April 1493, and over the next four years translations were published all over Europe in Latin, French, German, Italian and Catalan.[33]

The *Letter*, addressed in different editions to various high officials although its contents are invariable, stresses the fertility of the Caribbean islands and the tractability of their inhabitants. As would be expected in a document of this kind – which was basically a publicity brochure to attract further investment – the tortuousness of the *Journal* has been ironed out into simple findings. For obvious reasons the emphasis is now on the guilelessness and generosity of the natives of Juana (Cuba) and Hispaniola:

> They refuse nothing that they possess, if it be asked of them; on the contrary, they invite any one to share it and display as much love as if they would give their hearts. They are content with whatever trifle of whatever kind that may be given to them, whether it be of value or valueless. I forbade that they should be given things so worthless as fragments of broken crockery, scraps of broken glass and lace tips, although when they were able to get them, they fancied that they possessed the best jewel in the world.(*J* 194)

This was especially good news since on Hispaniola 'there are many spices and great mines of gold and of other metals' (*J* 194).

Possible drawbacks and dangers are not dwelt on but the Caribs do make a late and rather tentative appearance:

> Thus I have found no monsters, nor had a report of any, except in an island 'Carib,' which is the second at the coming into the Indies, and which is inhabited by a people who are regarded in all the islands as very fierce and who eat human flesh. They have many canoes with which they range through all the islands of India and pillage and take whatever they can. They are no more malformed than are the others, except that they have the custom of wearing their hair long like women, and they use bows and arrows of the same cane stems, with a small piece of wood at the end, owing to their lack of iron which they do not possess. They are ferocious among these other people who are cowardly to an excessive degree, but I make no more account of them than of the rest. (*J* 200)

Columbus's engagement at Las Flechas is not mentioned and there is no trace of the discursive struggle over the signifier 'Carib': the people of 'Carib' are unproblematically the 'monsters' – due to their anthropophagy – that many people, he says, expected that he would find. They correspond to Herodotean expectations and are firmly locked into that grid by the confirmatory evidence of the island of women ('Matinino'), the Amazons of classical ideology.[34] Their ferocity is, in other words, fully containable: 'I make no more account of them than of the rest.' It is via the *Letter*'s condensation of the *Journal*'s complexities that the basic contrast within the native Caribbean population between the guileless and the ferocious enters European consciousness, with the ferocity exemplified by anthropophagy and sutured to the word 'Carib' and its cognates.[35]