

## Review article

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### **Ninety-two not out: Eduardo Galeano and the Columbus quincentenary**

**W. George Lovell**

E. GALEANO, *Memory of Fire* (London and New York: Quartet Books). Vol. 1: *Genesis* (1985, Pp. xvii + 293, £11.95), Vol. II: *Faces and Masks* (1987, Pp. xvi + 276, £14.95) and Vol. III: *Century of the Wind* (1988. Pp. xviii + 301. £15.95)

There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.

Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*

Christopher Columbus . . . . When he set out he didn't know where he was going, when he got there he didn't know where he was, when he came back he didn't know where he had been, and he did it all on someone else's money.

Carl MacDougall, *Stone Over Water*

We have always been surrounded by terror and by the beauty that is an inseparable part of it.

Josef Skvorecky, *The Engineer of Human Souls*

In Seville, a key city during colonial times in the Spanish scheme of empire, a guide to the *Archivo General de Indias* claims that if the contents of the archive were laid out, folio by folio, page after page, then the chain of paper generated would stretch in space from Chile to California, from the southern fringe to the northern edge of imperial Spain's far-flung American possessions. How many more chains of paper the Columbus quincentenary has generated is anyone's guess. Their spatial reach would surely exceed that of the archive, and perhaps even symbolically span four Atlantic crossings as well as a Pacific rim. The flood of print unleashed by the quincentenary also has, in our modern age, an extravagant visual counterpart: television documentaries and mini-series, star-studded feature films, theatrical performances, historical re-enactments, and museum exhibits that traverse the globe from one major venue to the next. And postmodern consumerism will out. One morning at breakfast I tried not to be too astonished at seeing a Disneyfied Columbus adorn a box of cereal, the Admiral's cartoon-like Ocean Sea inhabited by a smiling Loch Ness Monster, his three ships modelled on an adman's concept of what a lucky boy plays with in the bathtub. Poor Columbus, I thought: not even he could have imagined that immortality lay on the back of a carton of Rice Chex.

No easy task, then, coming to terms with the quincentenary. 1492. A good year for some, a bad year for Others. Whether we celebrate or mourn, few dates in history are as pivotal, setting in motion events whose outcomes reverberate still. What follows is an attempt to monitor some recent publications and evaluate them in relation to established

notions of how the Americas were shaped from the time of Columbus on. One work in particular stands up to quincennial scrutiny remarkably well—Eduardo Galeano's three-volume *Memory of Fire*, an appraisal of which may serve to introduce a Latin American writer of prodigious talent to a new readership in historical geography.

### The Image

One hundred years ago, with a lavish exposition in Chicago the centrepiece of celebration, Columbus was a symbol of progress, an icon of modernity. The "New World" he "discovered" may not have been called after him but his soul, tormented in life, presumably rested in celestial peace as cities, rivers, provinces, states, streets, and a nation by then bore his name. A record company and a Hollywood film studio soon paid homage. The image lingers of Columbus the Adventurer, Columbus the Explorer, Columbus the Great Historical Figure. A good example of the continuing belief in Columbus the Hero is a new English-language biography by Paolo Emilio Taviani, an abridged translation of the Italian scholar and statesman's four-volume study of "one of the two greatest sailors of all time (the other being Cook)".<sup>[1]</sup> Taviani's tone is unabashedly triumphal. For him, Columbus was a "self-taught man without formal education" who "nevertheless became a great geographer".<sup>[2]</sup> A "veil of mystery" as to what lay west of Europe "was torn asunder only by the genius, tenacity, and faith of Christopher Columbus".<sup>[3]</sup> For Taviani, Columbus is still Superman.

Far more circumspect, inclined to look at both sides of the ledger, above all else disposed to portraying Columbus less as a historical monument and more as part of a historical process is the collaborative effort of William and Carla Phillips and the measured account of Felipe Fernández-Armesto.<sup>[4]</sup> Context here is foremost, with care being taken to situate Columbus in an evolving, complex picture: the Phillips' argue that "we should try to view the voyages of Columbus as the culmination of one scene in a much broader drama"<sup>[5]</sup> while Fernández-Armesto sees his subject, simultaneously, as "selectively enlightened", "a self-avowed ignoramus who challenged the received wisdom of his day", and "one of the first beacons of the Scientific Revolution, whose glow was kindled from within by their preference for experiment over authority".<sup>[6]</sup> Fernández-Armesto also depicts Columbus, in lobbying for royal patronage, as a shrewd operator whose instinct and savvy eventually got him the commission he craved. So political an animal was Columbus that Mascarenhas Barreto would have us believe that he was a "secret agent" in the pay and under the influence of a Portuguese Crown intent on subverting the expansionist ambitions of arch-rival Spain.<sup>[7]</sup> Barreto makes his case by a dextrous use of evidence one usually associates with such nimble minds as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle or P. D. James.

### The Legacy

If Barreto's Columbus is a master of duplicity and subterfuge, the Columbus of Kirkpatrick Sale is decidedly less ambiguous.<sup>[8]</sup> With more than a whiff of moral outrage, some of it reasonably grounded, parts of it misguided if not naive, Sale declares Columbus to be "the figure who, more than any other, provided the legacy by which European civilization came to dominate the American world for five centuries, with consequences, we now realize, involving issues of life and death".<sup>[9]</sup> Sale's title, lifted by film-maker Ridley Scott to propel his rather fanciful *1492*, says it all: a "paradise" was "conquered", and little good has come of it since. Sale acknowledges Carl Sauer's *Early Spanish Main* as one of his key sources, crediting Sauer for recognizing "a darker side" to the Columbus story than previous researchers had revealed.<sup>[10]</sup> He asserts: "Every age, of course, casts the heroes it needs".<sup>[11]</sup> And its villains. In the hands of Sale, Columbus the Good Guy becomes Columbus the Bad Guy, the latter construct one of tremendous value in pointing the finger and assigning blame in an age of "political correctness".

A sympathetic antidote to the New World order as described by Sale is provided by William M. Denevan in "The Pristine Myth", one of ten essays commissioned by Karl W. Butzer for a special quincennial issue of the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*.<sup>[12]</sup> Here the Columbus legacy is examined primarily in terms of European exploration and colonization, disease impact and native depopulation, landscape evolution, scientific knowledge, and the history of ideas. Elsewhere, Butzer asks whether the Columbus quincennial should be an occasion to elicit "Judgement or Understanding".<sup>[13]</sup> His reflections are significantly less categorical than Sale's:

My interpretation is that what happened after 1492 was not the consequence of one man's vision, or of one government's geopolitical goals, or of one nation's faults of character. Rather, these momentous events were the cumulative outcome of hundreds and thousands of actions by complex human beings, in the particular context of the inevitable encounter between two long-isolated hemispheres. Those people—innocent, flawed, or villainous—were not Spanish or English or French. They were the Everyman of the Medieval morality plays. The lessons to be learned from the Encounter, I believe, should speak to each of us. The Quincennial is not an occasion for blame, because there is more than enough shame for all the active participants in the drama. What it does allow is an opportunity for self-reflection.<sup>[14]</sup>

Butzer concludes:

The culture realm that calls itself Western Civilization has, even after five centuries, not yet learned to accept and to build upon cultural diversity. The challenge is how, in the next hundred years, we can learn to do otherwise.<sup>[15]</sup>

### The "Othercide"

Butzer's reflections are important. The fact remains, however, that not "all the active participants" have enjoyed equal time in the sun. Certain voices have been stifled, others shouted down, pummelled and crushed into a deafening silence. Just as we must learn how to speak, so also must we learn how to listen, no matter how shrill or painful some of what we hear strikes our ears. No Tainos, the first recorded casualties of the intrusion that began with Columbus, exist any more, their "pacification by terror" at the hands of "a chronic, compulsive romancer" whom "experience taught nothing" causing them to perish, through enslavement, forced labour, malnutrition, and sickness, by 1524.<sup>[16]</sup> Their suffering under Columbus, and their way of life before his arrival, have been assiduously documented by Irving Rouse.<sup>[17]</sup> His reconstruction is sober, erudite, and nicely crafted.

If no Tainos survived to tell their side of the story, the same cannot be said of the Maya of Guatemala, still today a vibrant, resourceful people who endure despite the iniquities of a conquest which, for them, has yet to end.<sup>[18]</sup> Awarding the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize to Rigoberta Menchú, a woman whose account of being a modern Maya speaks in many ways not just for one individual but for an entire culture, empowers the native point of view and allows it to be articulated with greater authority.<sup>[19]</sup> Menchú's moving testimony, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, is part of a Maya renaissance, a cultural awakening in which Guatemalan Indians address their reality as painters, poets, novelists, teachers, and university professors as well as engaged political activists.<sup>[20]</sup> Much of what they create brings us face to face with an immense sadness. A novel by Gaspar Pedro González, *La otra cara*, recounts a tale of poverty and exploitation with a Dickensian eye for detail.<sup>[21]</sup> A collection of oral histories recorded by Victor Montejo and Q'anil Akab', who interviewed a handful of the 200,000 Maya who fled to Mexico in the 1980's to escape government repression, is soaked in blood.<sup>[22]</sup> The play on Las Casas invoked by their title (*Brevísima relación testimonial de la continua destrucción del Mayab'*) is brutally effective, an Indian lament that conquest in Guatemala is unfinished business.<sup>[23]</sup> Preoccupation with the interplay between conquest and resistance, among the Maya of Belize, Chiapas, and the Yucatán as well as their relations in Guatemala, has now spawned an impressive body of literature.<sup>[24]</sup> In *Stolen Continents*, Ronald Wright extends the theme beyond the Maya realm to piece together native versions of

“Invasion”, “Resistance”, and “Rebirth”—he examines long-term survival among the Aztec, Cherokee, Inca, and Iroquois in addition to the Maya—that are as provocative as they are alternative.<sup>[25]</sup>

### The Memory Man

Like Wright, the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano believes in producing history that runs, in the words of Walter Benjamin, “against the grain”.<sup>[26]</sup> To my mind, nothing I encountered in print during the quincentenary explores as powerfully as does *Memory of Fire* the meaning and consequences of the historic landfall Columbus made five centuries ago. For all the Americas, but especially for Latin America, Galeano has tailored a living history that never will die. *Genesis* covers the period from time immemorial through the era of European entry until the year 1700. *Faces and Masks* is anchored in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. *Century of the Wind* spans the years between 1900 and 1984. The events Galeano writes about are rooted in a specific time and a specific place, with each episode in the first two volumes attributed to one or more documentary sources. Most episodes in the third volume are similarly referenced, with an occasional recounting of more recent happenings based on interviews, journals, or personal exchanges. Few of Galeano’s evocations run more than five hundred words in length, the majority of them considerably less. He cuts always to the quick, searching for essence. If we flick through the pages of *Memory of Fire*, what do we find?

First we are informed (*Genesis*, p. xv) about why the project was embarked on in the manner it was:

I was a wretched history student. History classes were like visits to the waxworks or the Region of the Dead. The past was lifeless, hollow, dumb. They taught us about the past so that we should resign ourselves with drained consciences to the present: not to make history, which was already made, but to accept it. Poor History had stopped breathing: betrayed in academic texts, lied about in classrooms, drowned in dates, they had imprisoned her in museums and buried her, with floral wreaths, beneath statuary bronze and monumental marble.

Perhaps *Memory of Fire* can help give her back breath, liberty, and the word.

That fateful day—October 12, 1492—has Galeano (*Genesis*, pp. 45–56) picture Columbus and his crew, in multilingual confusion, on the shores of Guanahani Island thus:

He falls on his knees, weeps, kisses the earth. He steps forward, staggering because for more than a month he has hardly slept, and beheads some shrubs with his sword.

Then he raises the flag. On one knee, eyes lifted to heaven, he pronounces three times the names of Isabella and Ferdinand. Beside him the scribe Rodrigo de Escobedo, a man slow of pen, draws up the document.

From today, everything belongs to those remote monarchs: the coral sea, the beaches, the rocks all green with moss, the woods, the parrots, and these laurel-skinned people who gaze dazedly at the scene.

Luis de Torres translates Christopher Columbus’s questions into Hebrew, tries out his small stock of Chaldean, then his Arabic, the little he knows of it: “Japan? China? Gold?”

The interpreter apologizes to Columbus in the language of Castile. Columbus curses in Genovese and throws to the ground his credentials, written in Latin and addressed to the Great Khan. The naked men watch the anger of the intruder with red hair and coarse skins, who wears a velvet cape and very shiny clothes.

Soon the word will spread through the islands: “Come and see the men who arrived from the sky! Bring them food and drink!”

Three years later, in a city famed as a seat of learning, an attempt was made to close the distance of difference, of which language was but one obstacle among many. Galeano (*Genesis*, p. 50) scissored and deconstructs. It is 1495 in Salamanca:

Elio Antonio de Nebrija, language scholar, publishes here his “Spanish-Latin Vocabulary”. The dictionary includes the first Americanism of the Castilian language:

*Canoa: Boat made from a single timber.*

The new word comes from the Antilles.

These boats without sails, made of the trunk of a ceiba tree, welcomed Christopher Columbus. Out from the islands, paddling canoes, came the men with long black hair and bodies tattooed with vermilion symbols. They approached the caravels, offered fresh water, and exchanged gold for the kind of little tin bells that sell for a copper in Castile.

Italics, as deployed in two previous vignettes, are used whenever Galeano chooses to lift words directly from his sources. This he does with dramatic effect throughout *Memory of Fire*, often allowing the voices he borrows from to have the final, unmediated say. The strategy, at times, serves only to increase our astonishment while at the same time keeping us grounded in historical fact, not human invention. It works particularly well when Galeano introduces us (*Genesis*, p. 82) to the survivors of the ill-fated expedition to Florida led by Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. The year is 1528, the place called Bad Luck Island:

The shipwrecked men, naked specters, tremble with cold and weep among the rocks of Mal Hado Island. Some Indians turn up to bring them water and fish and roots and seeing them weep, weep with them. The Indians shed rivers of tears, and the longer the lamentations continue, the sorrier the Spaniards feel for themselves.

The Indians lead them to their village. So that the sailors won't die from the cold, they keep lighting fires at rest stops along the way. Between bonfire and bonfire they carry them on litters, without letting their feet touch ground.

The Spaniards imagine that the Indians will cut them into pieces and throw them in the stewpot, but in the village they continue sharing with them the little food they have. As Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca will tell it, the Indians are horrified and hot with anger when they learn that, while on the beach, five Christians ate one another until only one remained, who being alone had no one to eat him.<sup>[27]</sup>

Cabeza de Vaca, who wandered between November 1528 and July 1536 six thousand miles from the scene of his misfortune, near the present site of Galveston, across Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and northwestern Mexico before arriving in Mexico City, is only one of a cast of hundreds treated by Galeano not as anomalies or eccentrics but as individuals whose personal dilemma, whose personal tragedy, or whose personal courage reflect the complexities and contradictions of the age in which they lived. We hear of rebellious Indians, demented conquistadors, tired kings, good priests and bad, runaway slaves, ruthless pirates, of the weak and poor not just the strong and rich, of women and children, of men and dogs, of gods and demons.

The actions of the Franciscan Friar Diego de Landa (*Genesis*, p. 137) provide Galeano with one of his most vivid portrayals, as well as the opportunity to observe what it is that allows people to transcend even the darkest despair, a resolve that greatly concerns him. The year is 1562, the place a town in the Yucatán called Maní:

Fray Diego de Landa throws into the flames, one after the other, the books of the Mayas.

The inquisitor curses Satan, and the fire crackles and devours. Around the incinerator, heretics howl with their heads down. Hung by the feet, flayed with whips, Indians are doused with boiling wax as the fire flares up and the books snap, as if complaining.

Tonight, eight centuries of Mayan literature turn to ashes. On these long sheets of bark paper, signs and images spoke: They told of work done and days spent, of the dreams and the wars of a people born before Christ. With hog-bristle brushes, the knowers of things had painted these illuminated, illuminating books so that the grandchildren's grandchildren should not be blind, should know how to see themselves and see the history of their folk, so they should know the movements of the stars, the frequency of eclipses and the prophecies of the gods and so they could call for rains and good corn harvests.

In the center, the inquisitor burns the books. Around the huge bonfire, he chastises the readers. Meanwhile, the authors, artist-priests dead years or centuries ago, drink chocolate in the fresh shade of the first tree of the world. They are at peace, because they died knowing that memory cannot be burned. Will not what they painted be sung and danced through the times of the times?

When its little paper houses are burned, memory finds refuge in mouths that sing the glories of men and of gods, *songs that stay on from people to people* and in bodies that dance to the sound of hollow trunks, tortoise shells, and reed flutes.<sup>[28]</sup>

Wilful and wanton destruction, the deliberate obliteration of one culture by another, and not only when vile acts are perpetrated by Europeans on Native Americans but also when the latter unleash their venom on the invader or on each other, attracts much of Galeano's attention. So too, however, does his eye catch the intensity of certain forces brought into being more by accident than by design, as in the murderous erosion (*Genesis*, pp. 150–51) of New World populations by the scourge of Old World disease. The year is 1576, the place Xochimilco in the Valley of Mexico:

Here even nursing babies have paid tribute, in money and in corn. If the pestilence goes on, who will pay? Local hands have built the cathedral of Mexico. If the plague does not stop, who will sow these fields? Who will spin and weave in the workshops? Who will build cathedrals and pave streets?

The Franciscans discuss the situation in their monastery. Of the thirty thousand Indians in Xochimilco when the Spaniards came, four thousand are left, and that is an exaggeration. Many died fighting with Hernán Cortés, conquering men and lands for him, and more died working for him and for Pedro de Alvarado, and the epidemic is killing more.

Fray Jerónimo de Mendieta, the monastery guardian, comes up with the inspiration that saves the day.

They prepare to draw lots. An acolyte, blindfolded, stirs slips of paper in the silver dish. On each slip is written the name of a saint of proven prestige at the celestial court. The acolyte chooses one, and Father Mendieta unfolds it and reads: "It's the Apostle Santiago!"

From the balcony it is announced to the Indians of Xochimilco in their language. The apocalyptic monk speaks on his knees, raising his arms. "Santiago will defeat the pestilence!"

He promises him an altar.<sup>[29]</sup>

Galeano's likes and dislikes are apparent, for he refuses to conceal for whom his heart is open and for whom his heart is closed. Among the former is Guamán Poma, an old man who calls himself (*Genesis*, pp. 184–85) the "king's counselor". The year is 1615, the place Lima, the City of Kings:

At seventy, he leans over the table, wets the pen in the horn inkpot, and writes and draws defiantly. He is a man of hasty and broken prose. He curses the invader in the invader's tongue and makes it explode. The language of Castile keeps tripping over Quechua and Aymara words, but after all, Castile is Castile for the Indians, and *without the Indians Your Majesty isn't worth a thing* . . .

*To write this letter is to weep.* Words, images, tears of rage. *The Indians are the natural owners of this realm.* The apostle Santiago, in military uniform, tramples on a fallen native. At banquets, the plates are heaped with miniature women. The muleteer carries a basket filled with the mestizo children of the priest. *Also it is God's punishment that many Indians die in mercury and silver mines. In all Peru, where there were a hundred not ten remain.* "Do you eat this gold?" asks the Inca, and the conquistador replies: "This gold we eat".

Today, Guamán finishes his letter and dies.

Neither Philip III nor any other king will ever see it. For three centuries it will roam the earth, lost.<sup>[30]</sup>

The chronology of conquest means that, in Galeano's scheme of things, it is not until *Faces and Masks* and *Century of the Wind* that Canada and the United States appear with greater frequency. From the chroniclers of New France (*Faces and Masks*, pp. 16–17) Galeano offers the following snapshots. It is the early eighteenth century in Quebec:

Among the Indians of Canada there are no paunches nor any hunchbacks, say the French friars and explorers. If there is one who is lame, or blind, or one-eyed, it is from a war wound.

They do not know about property or envy, says Pouchot, and call money *the Frenchmen's snake*.

They think it ridiculous to obey a fellow man, says Lafitau. They elect chiefs who have no privilege whatsoever; and if one gets bossy, they depose him. Women give opinions and decisions on par with men. Councils of elders and public assemblies have the final word; but no human word has precedence over the voice of dreams.

They obey dreams as Christians do the divine mandate, says Brébeuf. They obey them every day, because the soul speaks through dreams every night; and when winter comes to an end and the ice of the world is broken, they throw a big party dedicated to dreams. Then the Indians dress up in costumes and every kind of madness is permitted.

They eat when they are hungry, says Cartier. Appetite is the only clock they know.

They are libertines, Le Jeune observes. Both women and men can break their marriage vows when they like. Virginity means nothing to them. Champlain has found women who have been married twenty times.

According to Brébeuf, the Indians cannot grasp the idea of hell. They have never heard of eternal punishment. When Christians threaten them with hell, the savage asks: *And will my friends be there in hell?*

Farther west (*Faces and Masks*, p. 179) we contemplate the approach of the frontier in the company of Chief Seattle. It is 1855 in Washington Territory:

Is anyone really listening to old Chief Seattle? The Indians are condemned, like the buffalo and the moose. The one that does not die by the bullet dies of hunger or sorrow. From the reservation where he languishes, old Chief Seattle talks in solitude about usurpations and exterminations and says who knows what things about the memory of his people flowing in the sap of the trees.

The Colt barks. Like the sun, the white pioneers march westward. A diamond light from the mountains guides them. The promised land rejuvenates anyone sticking a plow in to make it fertile. In a flash cities and streets spring up in the solitude so recently inhabited by cacti, Indians, and snakes. The climate, they say, is so very healthy that the only way to inaugurate cemeteries is to shoot someone down.

Adolescent capitalism, stampeding and gluttonous, transfigures what it touches. The forest exists for the axe to chop down and the desert for the train to cross; the river is worth bothering about if it contains gold, and the mountain if it shelters coal or iron. No one walks. All run, in a hurry, it's urgent, after the nomad shadow of wealth and power. Space exists for time to defeat, and time for progress to sacrifice on its altars.

Galeano sweeps through the present century, from the inventions of Thomas Edison to the interventions of Ronald Reagan, meditating on failed revolutions, soccer players, archbishops and gangsters, painters and writers, riots and fiestas, music and movies, coups and elections, and dozens of other diverse topics and equally diverse characters. He ends, appropriately, with a letter to his translator, the late Cedric Belfrage, who coaxes from Spanish with the same empathy in which Galeano writes (*Century of the Wind*, pp. 278–79). The year is 1986, the place Montevideo:

*My Dear Cedric:*

*Here goes the last volume of Memory of Fire. As you'll see, it ends in 1984. Why not before, or after, I don't know. Perhaps because that was the last year of my exile, the end of a cycle, the end of a century; or perhaps because the book and I know that the last page is also the first.*

*Forgive me if it came out too long. Writing it was a joy for my hand; and now I feel more than ever proud of having been born in America, in this shit, in this marvel, during the century of the wind.*

*No more now, because I don't want to bury the sacred in palaver.*

*Abrazos,*

*Eduardo*

Galeano's labours in total amount to almost one thousand printed pages. From more than that same number of books, and from the hive of his imagination, he furnishes approximately twelve-hundred textual miniatures, bits and pieces of wonder. These fragments constitute a unique literary form of historical geography, one that may be

consulted, and cherished, long after the quincentennial is over but when the need to illuminate Columbus and his legacy remains.

*Queen's University at Kingston*

### Acknowledgements

The first six months of 1992, for me, coincided with a period of sabbatical leave from Queen's University. This privilege, for which I would like to record formal thanks, allowed me to catch up on long-lapsed reading, some of which I assess here. During my sabbatical, exchanges with Karl W. Butzer, Boris Castel, Alexandra Parma and Noble David Cook, William M. Denevan, Daniel W. Gade, Mike González, Christopher H. Lutz, James J. Parsons, Barbara Potthast, Alastair Reid, and Ronald Wright proved enlightening as well as entertaining. The peace and quiet of South Woodstock, Vermont, my sabbatical base, afforded many benefits, among them pleasant hours in the Termer Library at Plumsock Mesoamerican Studies and in the Baker Library at Dartmouth College. Returning to normal duties at Queen's for Fall Term 1992 allowed me to interact with Dawn Bowen, Richard Hough, and Michael Ripmeester, who helped me instruct two undergraduate classes whose assignments included projects on Columbus and Galeano. From the students and their assignments I learned much. Deborah L. Simmons introduced me to the work of Walter Benjamin and Rohini L. Wilkie furnished me with the quotation from the Scottish novelist Carl MacDougall. Parts of the text here called "Memory of Fire" appear, in another form, in W. G. Lovell, *Re-membering America: the historical vision of Eduardo Galeano* *Queen's Quarterly* 99, 3 (1992) 609–17. The notion of "Othercide" is developed by Galeano in his *We say no: chronicles, 1963–1991* (New York 1992) 303–16. I thank Susan Bergholz, Eduardo Galeano's "literary angel", for bringing "Othercide" to my attention and especially for her commitment to creating an English-language platform for such a courageous writer.

### Notes

- [1] P. E. Traviani, *Columbus: the great adventure* (New York 1991) 262
- [2] *Ibid.*, 259
- [3] *Ibid.*, 262
- [4] W. D. Phillips, Jr. and C. R. Phillips, *The worlds of Christopher Columbus* (Cambridge 1992); F. Fernández-Armesto, *Columbus* (Oxford 1991)
- [5] Phillips and Phillips, *op cit.*, 273
- [6] Fernández-Armesto, *op. cit.*, 105 and 191
- [7] M. Barreto, *The Portuguese Columbus: secret agent of King John II* (London 1992)
- [8] K. Sale, *The conquest of paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian legacy* (New York 1990)
- [9] *Ibid.*, 5
- [10] *Ibid.*, 392. Carl Sauer's *The early Spanish Main*, first published by the University of California Press in 1966, was re-issued in 1992 to mark the Columbus quincentenary. The latter reprint contains an insightful *Foreword* by Anthony Pagden, whose *The fall of natural man: the American Indian and the origins of comparative ethnology* (Cambridge 1982) also makes for fruitful reading. Sale's reading of Sauer is rather selective, but the latter does provide the former with plenty of ammunition
- [11] Sale, *op. cit.*, 235
- [12] W. M. Denevan, The pristine myth, in K. W. Butzer (Ed.), *The Americas before and after 1492: current geographical research*, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82, 3 (1992) 367–85
- [13] K. W. Butzer, Judgement or Understanding? Reflections on 1492, in B. Castel and W. G. Lovell (Eds.), *America and Europe: 500 years after Columbus*, *Queen's Quarterly* 99, 3 (1992) 581–600
- [14] *Ibid.*, 598
- [15] *Ibid.*, 598
- [16] The words in quotation are from Sauer, *op. cit.*, 104 and 291
- [17] I. Rouse, *The Tainos: rise and decline of the people who greeted Columbus* (New Haven 1992)
- [18] See, among other works, R. M. Carmack (Ed.), *Harvest of violence: the Maya Indians and the Guatemalan crisis* (Norman 1988); W. G. Lovell, Surviving conquest: the Maya of Guatemala in historical perspective *Latin American Research Review* 23, 2 (1988) 25–27; and C. A. Smith (Ed.), *Guatemalan Indians and the state, 1540–1988* (Austin 1990)



- [19] R. Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: an Indian woman in Guatemala* (London 1984)
- [20] The movement is discussed, not unproblematically, in C. A. Smith, Maya nationalism, *NACLA Report on the Americas: the first nations, 1492-1992* 25, 3 (1991) 29-33
- [21] G. P. González, *La otra cara* (Guatemala 1992)
- [22] V. Montejo and Q. Akab, *Brevísima relación testimonial de la continua destrucción del Mayab' (Guatemala)* (Rhode Island 1992)
- [23] The *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las yndias* was first published in Seville in 1552. Its author, Bartolomé de las Casas, remains one of the most crucial figures in any attempt to understand the operation of Spain in America. A new English-language edition, translated by Herma Briffault, is *The devastation of the Indies: a brief account* (Baltimore 1992)
- [24] For a general evaluation, see B. Keen, Recent writing on the Spanish conquest *Latin American Research Review* 20, 2 (1985) 161-71 and W. G. Lovell, Rethinking conquest: The colonial experience in Latin America *Journal of Historical Geography* 12, 3 (1986) 310-17. For a specifically Mayan evaluation, see M. Bertrand, *Terre et société coloniale: les communautés Maya-Quiché de la région de Rabinal du XVIIe au XIXe siècle* (Mexico 1987); B. E. Borg, Ethnohistory of the Sacatepéquez Cakchiquel Maya, ca. 1450-1690 (Unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Missouri, 1986); R. M. Carmack, *The Quiché Mayas of Utatlán: the evolution of a highland Guatemalan kingdom* (Norman 1981); I. Clendinnen, *Ambivalent conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatán, 1517-1570* (Cambridge 1987); N. M. Farriss, *Maya society under Spanish rule: the collective enterprise of survival* (Princeton 1984); K. Gosner, *Soldiers of the Virgin: the moral economy of a colonial Maya rebellion* (Tucson 1992); R. M. Hill II, *Colonial Cakchiquels: Highland Maya adaptations to Spanish rule, 1600-1700* (Fort Worth 1991); R. M. Hill II and J. Monaghan, *Continuities in highland Maya social organization: ethnohistory in Sacapulas* (Philadelphia 1987); G. D. Jones, *Maya resistance to Spanish rule: time and history on a colonial frontier* (Albuquerque 1989); M. del Carmen León Cázares, *Un levantamiento en nombre del Rey Nuestro Señor* (Mexico 1988); W. G. Lovell, *Conquest and survival in colonial Guatemala: a historical geography of the Cuchumatán highlands, 1500-1821* (Montreal and Kingston 1992); S. L. Orellana, *The Tzutujil Mayas: continuity and change, 1250-1630* (Norman 1984); J. Piel, *Sajcabajá: muerte y resurrección de un pueblo de Guatemala, 1500-1970* (Guatemala 1989); P. Sullivan, *Unfinished conversations: Mayas and foreigners between two wars* (New York 1989); J. M. Watanabe, *Maya saints and souls in a changing world* (Austin 1992); and E. A. Zamora, *Los mayas de las tierras altas en el siglo XVI: tradición y cambio en Guatemala* (Seville 1985)
- [25] R. Wright, *Stolen continents: the Indian story* (London 1992)
- [26] W. Benjamin, Theses on the philosophy of history, in *Illuminations* (edited and introduced by H. Arendt) (New York 1968) 257
- [27] For more on the remarkable experiences of Cabeza de Vaca, see M. Bishop, *The odyssey of Cabeza de Vaca* (New York 1933) and H. Long, *The marvellous adventure of Cabeza de Vaca* (London 1987). The conquistador tells his own story in *Adventures in the unknown interior of America* (edited and translated by C. Covey) (Albuquerque 1983). A film by the Mexican director Nicolás Echevarría, simply called *Cabeza de Vaca*, is a journey into the mystic
- [28] Landa's actions, the subject of much controversy, are discussed in some detail in Clendinnen, *op. cit.*, 66-111. The Franciscan's own account of the book burning - "as they contained nothing in which there was not to be seen superstition and lies of the devil, we burned them all, which [the Indians] regretted to an amazing degree and which caused them great affliction" - may be consulted in *Landa's relación de las cosas de Yucatán* (edited and translated by A. M. Tozzer) (Cambridge, Mass. 1941)
- [29] For more on the role sickness played in shaping the native experience, see N. D. Cook and W. G. Lovell, (Eds.) 'Secret judgments of God': Old World disease in colonial Spanish America (Norman 1992); W. G. Lovell, 'Heavy shadows and black night': disease and depopulation in colonial Spanish America *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82, 3 (1992) 426-43; and L. A. Newson, Indian population patterns in colonial Spanish America *Latin American Research Review* 20, 3 (1985) 41-74
- [30] The lifetime's work of the "king's counselor" is appraised in R. Adorno, *Guamán Poma: writing and resistance in colonial Peru* (Austin 1986)