



# THE POETICS — OF — IMPERIALISM

Translation and  
Colonization from  
*The Tempest* to *Tarzan*

ERIC CHEYFITZ

New York Oxford  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
1991

# THE POETICS — OF — IMPERIALISM

Translation and  
Colonization from  
*The Tempest* to *Tarzan*

ERIC CHEYFITZ

New York Oxford  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
1991

Oxford University Press

Oxford New York Toronto  
Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi  
Petaling Jaya Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo  
Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town  
Melbourne Auckland

and associated companies in  
Berlin Ibadan

Copyright © 1991 by Oxford University Press, Inc.

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.,  
200 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,  
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,  
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,  
without the prior permission of Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Cheyfitz, Eric.

The poetics of imperialism : translation and colonization from  
The Tempest to Tarzan / Eric Cheyfitz.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-19-505095-9

1. American literature—History and criticism. 2. Imperialism in  
literature. 3. Minorities in literature. I. Title.

PS169.I45C4 1991

810.9'358—dc20 90-6862 CIP

*In memory of Edward and Joseph Cheyfitz,  
Faye Stevenson, and Isadore Pollock,  
the strong sources of my social vision*

2 4 6 8 9 7 5 3 1

Printed in the United States of America  
on acid-free paper

## Acknowledgments

THE RESEARCH for this book was supported by a yearlong NEH fellowship at the Newberry Library in 1984–1985. I am grateful for the support, for the generous help and hospitality of the administrators and staff at the Library, and for the opportunity to share my work with other scholars working in my own and related fields. My project benefited in invaluable ways from the interdisciplinary community at the Newberry. Georgetown University supported this project as well with summer research grants.

Over the years this project has gained productive exposure in various forums in addition to the Newberry. Early in its conception, when it was going to be a book on the figure of translation in Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, David Marshall and Margaret Ferguson invited me to present part of it at a colloquium at Yale University. My essay on translation in *The Pioneers* was subsequently published in an anthology of criticism on Cooper, edited by Robert Clark. Although my work on Cooper receives only brief mention in this book, the theory of translation that informs the book was first articulated in the Cooper material and in the forums that welcomed it. I first presented what would become the chapter on *Tarzan* at a panel organized by Amy Kaplan for the American Studies Association's annual convention; and the chapter first appeared in *American Literary History*, whose editor, Gordon Hutner, has been generously supportive of my work. Parts of this book also received valuable criticism from colloquia at the University of Chicago, where I was a visiting professor of English in the fall of 1989, and at Southern Methodist University. My students at Chicago and Georgetown have engaged this material in ways that allowed me to read it anew as the project was proceeding. I am thankful for the energy of this engagement, which constantly helped to renew my own.

Peter Hulme saw an early prospectus for this project and generously

sent me some of his own work on the discourse of colonialism, which was subsequently published in his book *Colonial Encounters*. I engage this book in my own, and I can only make explicit what is implicit in this engagement: that I have learned a lot from it. My footnotes articulate other intellectual debts, though these notes by no means contain all these debts. For example, Richard Drinnon's *Facing West*, which I make no mention of, has strongly influenced my vision of the historical context of U.S. foreign policy toward the Third World.

Along the way, colleagues in various parts of the country have been supportive in ways for which I am grateful. Neil Saccamano sent me Roland Barthes' essay on metaphor, which was instrumental in provoking my thoughts on the subject. David Miller supplied me with useful bibliographies on the American Indians. Mary Beth Rose helped situate me in the Renaissance and talked with me about my project throughout my year at the Newberry. Robert Ferguson has given me the constant benefit of both his intellectual insight and his encouragement. Over the past six years, Dan Moshenberg and I have carried on a conversation about matters of literacy and power that informs this book. And I have learned much as well from Michael Ragussis, who has always taken the time to respond to my work. Eric Sundquist, Sacvan Bercovitch, William Brown, Chris Looby, Laura Tracy, John Carlos Rowe, Richard Brodhead, Donald Kartiganer, Catherine Ingraham, Walter Benn Michaels, and John Irwin have all helped out when help was needed. Bill Sisler at Oxford University Press has facilitated the realization of this project as a book in ways that have made working with him over the years the best of experiences.

Finally and first, there are those who are closest to me and have helped sustain this project at the place where love and criticism come together: my mother and my brother, my daughters (Rachel, Cara, and Ilana), my friend Jennifer Evans, and Darlene Evans, whose critical response to sections of this book proved crucial, and who has taught me much about persistence and devotion.

## Contents

### Introduction xi

1. *Tarzan of the Apes: U.S. Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* 3
2. *The Foreign Policy of Metaphor* 22
3. *Translating Property* 41
4. *Translation, Transportation, Usurpation* 59
5. *The Frontier of Decorum* 83
6. *The Empire of Poetics* 104
7. *Eloquent Cannibals* 142

### Notes 173

### Bibliography 185

### Index 193



## *Introduction*

Academic evidence is a euphemism for linguistic colonization of oral traditions and popular memories.

GERALD VIZENOR

I never heard of the mind/body split until I entered a Christian church.

A MENOMINEE INDIAN MAN AT A  
NEWBERRY LIBRARY SEMINAR  
(I quote this from my own oral tradition)

I embrace the world. I am the world. The white man has never understood this magic substitution. The white man wants the world; he wants it for himself alone. . . . He enslaves it. An acquisitive relation is established between the world and him. But there exist other values that fit only my forms.

\* \* \*

Uprooted, pursued, baffled, doomed to watch the dissolution of the truths that he has worked out for himself one after another, he has to give up projecting onto the world an antimony that coexists with him.

FRANTZ FANON

But the fifth world had become entangled with European names . . . all of creation suddenly had two names: an Indian name and a white name. Christianity separated the people from themselves; it tried to crush the single clan name, encouraging each person to stand alone, because Jesus Christ would save only the individual soul; Jesus Christ was not like the Mother who loved and cared for them as her children, as her family. . . . But now the feelings were twisted, tangled roots, and all the names for the source of this growth were buried under English words, out of reach.

\* \* \*

Everywhere he looked, he saw a world made of stories.

\* \* \*

[W]e invented white people; it was Indian witchery that made white people in the first place.

LESLIE MARMON SILKO

WHEN I WAS TWENTY, I went out for a while with a black woman, who lived with her mother and sisters in a housing project in Washington, D.C. One night, after I had been seeing her for a while, her mother asked me if I was Jewish. I said, simply, that I was. Her mother replied: I knew you weren't white.

In Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, a book that I have been returning to continually for the past twenty-five years, the paradigm for black alienation under colonialism is the historic situation of the Jews.<sup>1</sup> In the mythology of European New-World "discovery" of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the Indians were conceptualized, among other fantasies that Europeans fashioned of them, as the lost tribes of Israel. And in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which is important to the colonial history I write in what follows, Caliban—inescapably, as I will argue, Shakespeare's version of Native Americans—wears "garberdine"<sup>2</sup> a garment associated in the Renaissance Christian mind with Jews. Analyzing the appearance of ethnic stereotypes in American war movies of the 1950s, Vine Deloria noticed that "[t]he Jewish intellectual and the Indian formed some kind of attachment and were curiously the last ones killed." In his diagram of American society in the 1960s, Deloria provides another suggestive juxtaposition: "American society has always been divided into the mainstream white and black Americans who shared integrationist philosophies and the Indians, Mexicans, Jews, and ethnic concentrations who stubbornly held traditions and customs brought over from the old country. These are the OTHERS so casually mentioned when social problems are discussed." And for Deloria, who is particularly interested in the associations he reads between Jews and Indians, these others are communal peoples: "Moses took a loose confederation of tribal people, stuck in industrialized urban Egypt, and brought them out of Egypt after totally destroying the country. He then formed a much broader conception of religion based upon their experiences in that urban society, and reconstituted the tribal structure with

religion as the basis. So strong was the tribal-religious interpretation of identity, that the people of Israel have lasted nearly four thousand years and show no signs of weakening."<sup>3</sup> I find myself divided here between the "mainstream white," the acquisitive individual, and the OTHER, the tribal or communal person, of whom Moses and the Israelites are a crucial figure for Deloria, a Standing Rock Sioux. This conflict between individualism and communalism constitutes the dialogue I am currently engaged in. Materially grounded in a property-holding individualism, I seek to articulate an intense criticism of that ground. I seek to articulate, that is, a communal ground. For now, I am at once at the center of European culture and beyond its pale, in a tribal world. These are the conflictive forces that drive this book.

If in the preceding paragraph I seem to establish an identity between Afro-Americans, Jews, and Native Americans, let me disrupt that identity immediately without disrupting it entirely. Because of the history of slavery, the violent uprooting of Africans from their various cultures/languages, Afro-Americans have been for some time culturally European in crucial, though crucially not in all, ways, whereas Native Americans, because they retained their cultural/linguistic bases (a result of their being in America *first*), have retained a strong ground on which to stand and resist integration into, which typically means domination by, white society. In this book I am interested in some of the forms of this resistance, which is grounded in the social norms of kinship economies.

About Jews I have, after this introduction, nothing to say in this book, although it may be worth noting in a book about the origins of imperialism in the Americas that 1492 not only was the year of Columbus's voyage into the Caribbean but also of the defeat of the Moors in Spain and the expulsion of the Jews. This conjunction of European violence against Indians, blacks, and Jews is, I assume, not a coincidence. But today in the United States, in stark contrast to Afro-Americans and Indians, Jews, except for the very orthodox, are comfortably integrated *for the moment*. In other parts of the world such integration is not the case. And in Israel there are particular cultural/political problems: tensions between eastern and western Jews, tensions between a kibbutz system based on socialism and a surrounding economy based on international capitalism, tensions between Jews and Arabs both in and outside of Israel, centering precisely on the problem of where the inside and outside of Israel lie. In relation to the Palestinians, the Jews, who historically have much in common with "Third World" peoples, find themselves, though not univocally, in the

imperial position of the "First World" that is the object of my critique in this book.

The particular cultural and historical circumstances of blacks, Jews, and Native Americans complicate any simple identification with each other, which is to say that there is always a difficult politics operating when one thinks of articulating affinities with another. I have tried to keep this politics in mind as I wrote this book. Indeed, this book is about this politics.

In line with this politics, I have not tried to *understand* Native Americans or blacks in this book. I do not believe in philanthropy, which presumes an understanding of the position of the other, but in social justice, which presumes nothing, but grounds itself in the difficult politics of imagining kinship across the frontiers of race, gender, and class. This politics must begin and end with a critique of one's own place, and so the focus of this book is on Western European, that is to say, patriarchal, forms of imperial violence. But one cannot articulate a critique of one's own place unless one can also stand in a radically different place. Without imagining socialism, for example, something public opinion in the United States traditionally has been unable to do, except in the most negative, the most repressive, ways, we cannot imagine a critique of capitalism. So capitalism's social problems, which are the consequences of an intensifying and increasingly desperate global poverty, go unanswered. This is the place we find ourselves in today: having reached the limits of capitalism's imagination, we have no social vision, no other place, from which we can imagine constructive social action.

Thus, those of us who live within the privilege of Western patriarchy live in an increasingly narrow psychic and social space. For we cannot afford to enter most of the social spaces of the world; they have become dangerous to us, filled with the violence of the people we oppress, our own violence in alien forms we refuse to recognize. And we can afford less and less to think of these social spaces, to imagine the languages of their protest, for such imagining would keep us in continual conflict, in continual contradiction with ourselves, where we are increasingly locked away in our comfort. Terrorizing the world with our wealth and power, we live in a world of terror, afraid to venture out, afraid to think openly. Difference and dialogue are impossible here. We talk to ourselves about ourselves, believing in a grand hallucination that we are talking with others.

In focusing this study on patriarchal forms of imperial violence, I have necessarily had to stand in another place to critique these forms. Because my central historical concern is with Anglo-American and Native American conflict, though my range in this book takes in slavery in the United States as well as colonization in the Caribbean, the other place that I have chosen to stand, the place from which I launch my critique of the patriarchy, is the kinship economy that informed Native North American cultures at the time of contact and continues to inform them, a communal economy that Leslie Marmon Silko, among others, identifies with female forces. Given the difficult politics of identification that I want to negotiate in this work, my stand in this economy must be ironic. I hope, though, that this necessary irony has something in common with the liberating irony that I read (in Chapter 7) as the driving force of Montaigne's essay "Of the Canibales." As I understand it, the central concern of Montaigne's essay is the difficult politics of identification; and so my reading of his essay, among other things, is an articulation of my own place in writing this book.

This place is the place of translation. Like Montaigne, I know no Indian languages. This should present no methodological difficulties. For, like Montaigne, I am not writing to understand Native American cultures but to critique the violence of my own culture, specifically the violence of my own language. Yet, as mentioned, to activate such a critique, I, like Montaigne, must place myself in the cultures, in the languages, against which this violence has been and continues to be practiced. This problem of placement presents methodological difficulties. Like Montaigne, I can only deal with these difficulties through translators, all of whom, though, it must be emphasized, must deal with the problem of translation to varying degrees. The early voyagers, for example, on whom I, like Montaigne, must depend, knew virtually nothing of the native languages of the Americas, even as they freely translated them. I have made it a central part of my inquiry to ask what "translation" means under such circumstances. To take another example, I am dependent for my placement in Native American cultures on Keith Basso's *Portraits of "The Whiteman": Linguistic Play and Cultural Symbols Among the Western Apache*.<sup>4</sup> While Basso is conversant with the language of the Cibecue Apaches whom he studies, his study is so acutely aware of the politics of intercultural communication that we realize that even the *expert* translator requires a translator in order to speak, that immediacy is a fiction of power, not an actual possibility.



Basso's place in relation to Cibecue culture is clearly not that of the voyagers to Native American cultures, not only because of his linguistic expertise, but for political and historical reasons as well. Yet Basso's place, like the voyagers, is just as clearly not the place of the Indian culture he translates.

A final example. I also depend in my study on the writing of contemporary Native Americans, some of whom, articulating the specific dynamics of Native American cultures in relation to Anglo-American culture, do not speak their native languages. These people, like Scott Momaday and Leslie Marmon Silko, have access to their cultures primarily through English.<sup>5</sup> Yet because of their kinship in these cultures, the undoubted power of their writing takes on an immediacy that Basso's, for example, does not have. Still, we recognize that problems of translation exist here as well, perhaps most acutely here, where the place of the person in the culture is also the place of the person between cultures. Here problems of intercultural and intracultural communication intersect.

We must be in translation between cultures and between groups within our own culture if we are to understand the dynamics of our imperialism. For our imperialism historically has functioned (and continues to function) by substituting for the difficult politics of translation another politics of translation that represses these difficulties. It is the purpose of *The Poetics of Imperialism* to articulate the interplay between these two opposing politics of translation.

This book had two previous working titles, the first of which I have retained in a modified form as a subtitle. At the beginning of this project, I titled it *The Frontier of Translation: Language and Colonization from "The Tempest" to "Tarzan,"* which was intended to indicate the centrality of translation in defining the American frontier specifically (and any frontier for that matter). I have retained "translation" in the present subtitle to emphasize this centrality. Writing in the late 1970s about contact between settlers and Indians in the colonial South, Richard Beale Davis commented:

Communication between red man and white came primarily through the interpreter as intermediary; the oratory of representatives of both races in parleys, dialogues, and conferences; and the treaties, which employed both interpreter and orator and were art forms as well as historical documents. . . . The present writer has found no book or essay which is concerned with the special role . . . of the work of this familiar figure.<sup>6</sup>

I also have found no book or essay that deals with the central role of the translator in these negotiations. Nor have I found a book or essay that deals with the theoretical/historical problem of translation as it structures the Anglo-American/Native American frontier. *The Poetics of Imperialism* is the second kind of book. I hope it provides a conceptual framework for the first kind of study, if anyone should undertake it. It needs to be done.

Work has been done, of course, on problems of language and colonization, in which translation is an implicit problem. I find Basso's *Portraits of "The Whiteman"* and passages in Silko's *Ceremony* and Frederick Douglass's 1845 *Narrative* indispensable in this regard, as I do the first chapter of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, "The Negro and Language." I address these works within the figure of the frontier of translation in Chapter 6. (A significant part of Chapter 2 is also devoted to Douglass.) In Chapter 6 I address Stephen Greenblatt's and Tzvetan Todorov's work on language and colonization as well.<sup>7</sup> In a brief essay on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Greenblatt broaches some crucial figures of the linguistic colonization of the Americas that I delve into in this book. Among them is the figure of figures, metaphor, which I see functioning in a radically different way in Anglo-American colonial thinking than does Greenblatt. It is the historic relationship between translation and metaphor, the relationship articulated by the classical figure of *translatio*, that is the driving force of *The Poetics of Imperialism*, a relationship that has not been considered in the work on language and colonization.

In considering the function of metaphor in a poetics of imperialism, I am particularly interested in the way European invaders mapped the "New World" according to the opposition between the *metaphoric* and the *proper*, or *literal*. In the classical tradition of rhetoric from which this opposition is taken, the opposed terms are typically those of the *metaphoric* and the *proper*, the *literal* being a particular species of the *proper*, referring to a particular kind of textual interpretation. In the sixteenth-century English rhetorics that interest me here, then, as in the classical rhetorics of which they are virtually translations, the opposition is between the *metaphoric* and *proper*. It is only after the sixteenth century that the term *proper* as the antonym for metaphoric begins to become obsolete in English, until it is finally displaced by the term *literal*, which in the process tends to lose its specialized, or proper, meaning: pertaining to the letter. In the course of this book, I have occasion to use both forms

of this opposition (metaphoric/literal; metaphoric/proper), because both linguistic forms entail political forms that are crucial to an understanding of Anglo-American imperialism in the Americas. The notion of the *proper*, I argue, must be understood in relation to European notions of property and identity. As for the *literal*, it no doubt entails an ideology that privileges writing over the oral tradition of kinship cultures, while its figurative use for the notion of the *proper* has historically taken on a metaphysical force that naturalizes writing, concealing it as a technology—that is, as a form of politics.

While Todorov seems to recognize that writing is a cultural force, he nevertheless naturalizes it by placing it in an evolutionary scheme where it is an advance over the oral tradition. For him—and this is typical of much of the writing on European/Native American contact, even some of the most sensitive writing—there is nothing objectionable in the way the following statement figures the question of technology in general: “Societies that employ writing are more advanced than societies without writing” (252). By not querying what the word “advanced” means, Todorov universalizes and thus naturalizes a culturally specific form of technology. And while Todorov, who is wary of his evolutionary model even as he can’t resist using it, tells us that the notion of *advance* “does not involve a superiority on the level of moral and social values” (252), I would suggest that the model he uses to represent Native American life in *The Conquest of America* does imply such a superiority in European culture. This model is Aztec culture. And an extremely partial model it is. It lasted barely a moment in the historical scheme of things, and it is not at all representative of the vast majority of cultures in the Americas that were contemporaneous with it and whose representatives survive today. These are the egalitarian, or, perhaps more precisely, consensual, cultures based on the communal economy of kinship, of which Todorov seems oblivious. But his historical amnesia has an ideological point. For this Eastern European emigré in France wants to valorize Western European political/linguistic forms. Within the context of this desire, *The Conquest of America* is an allegory for capitalist democracy’s superiority to Communism, with the European conquerors and the Aztecs functioning respectively as protofigures of the former and latter. Within this allegory, individualism and egalitarianism become rigidly linked, as do communalism, or “sociality,” and hierarchy, which inevitably evolve into totalitarianism (252). For these identities to operate, Todorov must undertake the massive work of repressing the presence of kinship

economies in the Americas. These economies, as Eric Wolf has argued cogently in a work that I read in part in Chapter 3 of this book,<sup>8</sup> are egalitarian and communal, as opposed to capitalism’s hierarchical forms, based on a class system, in which it could be argued that authentic individualism, which would end the worker’s alienation from the productive forces of their labor, is suppressed along the lines of race and gender, as well as class.

While my immediate differences with Todorov have to do with his understanding of the initial contact between Columbus and the Arawaks (a kinship culture) and the model of intercultural communication that he derives from this encounter (a model to which Greenblatt also subscribes and which I analyze in Chapter 6), I have taken the time to note our radically different theoretical/historical views of the New World, because they produce radically different models of intercultural communication informed by divergent political agendas. It may be that I am no less of an allegorist than Todorov. It may be that anthropology can only be an allegory of Western culture.<sup>9</sup> Yet the models of intercultural communication that anthropology produces (and as allegory these intercultural models are intracultural) influence the actual contact between cultures, which is only to acknowledge that the models are political productions that produce politics. The politics of these models is, therefore, crucial and cannot be separated from the necessity of recognizing them as models, as figures of the other, not fact. Only the other has the right to decide if these figures touch his or her facts. If we are practicing the difficult politics of translation, rather than the politics of translation that represses this difficult politics, then such touch, however tentative, should occur. Todorov believes that the “representatives of Western civilization” (249) are now practicing the difficult politics of translation. As Chapter 1 makes clear, I believe that these representatives continue to practice the politics of translation that repress translation as dialogue in order to constitute it, under the guise of dialogue, as monologue.

My discussion of *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912)<sup>10</sup> places it at the end of a historical trajectory that commences with *The Tempest* (1611). In the initial conception of this work, I planned to work chronologically from *The Tempest* to *Tarzan*, exploring how the American frontier of translation articulated itself in a number of historical periods and literary texts. In the original title of this book, I juxtaposed *The Tempest* with *Tarzan* both to indicate the chronological scheme and to suggest the blurring of boundaries that ideology compels between “high” and “popular”

culture. The retention of this juxtaposition in the subtitle now only suggests a chronological scheme. For in *The Poetics of Imperialism*, I have substituted a dramatic structure for the original chronological scheme. After my reading of *Tarzan* in Chapter 1, I interpret a range of texts in various genres that span the late fifteenth to the twentieth centuries, while weaving in and out of a reading of *The Tempest*.

When I substituted the present structure for the chronological scheme, I changed my working title to *Crowning Powhatan: Translation and Empire in the Founding of Anglo-America*, indicating the concentrated historical focus that I had decided would be more efficient in many ways, from the intellectual to the economic, in dealing with the problems of translation. In addition it gave me a commanding figure, the English crowning of Powhatan at Werowocomoco in 1608, for the monologic politics of translation, and it foregrounded the crucial relation between translation and empire that my first title had not articulated. In brief, the present book articulates the historical relationship in the New World between translation, *translatio*, and the *translatio imperii et studii*, between, that is, a theory of communication, a theory of figurative language, and a theory of the transmission of power. These three forms of translation, I argue, find their most powerful and persistent expression, in both theoretical and historical terms, in a central or primal scene from classical rhetoric: the scene in which an orator through the power of eloquence “civilizes” “savage” humanity. And this scene, I also argue, is the driving force of Anglo-American imperialism in the New World from *The Tempest* to *Tarzan*.

Given the dramatic structure of this book and my intent to articulate the structure of a dramatic scene at the heart of our imperialism, it seemed to me as I brought this project to a close that, following the model of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, however informally, I was writing a poetics of imperialism rather than composing a historical narrative. Hence, the present primary title. But if I seem to oppose history and theory in this conclusion, let me note that my present primary title, *The Poetics of Imperialism*, juxtaposes them, in its conjunction of poetics and imperialism. I have tried in what follows, then, to put history and theory into play; for in actuality they are in play. This is what constitutes politics. And there is no way out of that.

## THE POETICS OF IMPERIALISM

To rob a man of his language in the very name of language: this is the first step in all legal murders.

ROLAND BARTHES

# — 1 —

## *Tarzan of the Apes: U.S. Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century*

I have come across the ages out of the dim and distant past from the lair of the primeval man to claim you—for your sake I have become a civilized man—for your sake I have crossed oceans and continents—for your sake I will be whatever you will me to be.

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

WE COULD UNDERSTAND these words, which I have taken out of context for the moment, from Edgar Rice Burroughs's exceptionally popular 1912 romance *Tarzan of the Apes*, as articulating the deepest desires of U.S. foreign policy toward the Third World in the twentieth century (243). From Teddy Roosevelt, its first clear voice, to Ronald Reagan and George Bush, its most recent (and we can consider Bush as no more than an echo of Reagan), this policy craves, in its deepest, most rapturous dreams, this response: the "barbarian" or "savage," or the "communist" or "terrorist," coming to claim the United States, not in the barbarian's terms, of course, nor in our own language struggling to translate itself, realizing the difficulty of translation, into the realities of those terms, but purely in America's terms, the savage in loving submission to our will, willingly speaking proper English, the language of "civilization," or, to translate this curious word "civilization," of capitalist democracy. When Reagan sends a cake and Bible as a sign to putative moderates in Iran, it seems to be this hallucinatory response that he seeks.

Written by a Chicagoan (son of the white, Protestant, upper middle class; sometime cowboy and gold miner; Indian fighter *manqué*; failed businessman, until he turned writer; superpatriot; and rejected applicant to the Rough Riders), *Tarzan of the Apes* appeared at a time when the second great wave of immigration to the United States, begun in the 1820s, was at its crest. And, as John Higham remarks, "[w]hereas the First Immigration had been entirely white and predominantly English-speaking [and Protestant], the second brought a Babel of tongues and an array of complexions" that threatened the Protestant vision of a homogenous America and provoked a resurgence of the Anglo-Saxon myth of race that "summoned Anglo-Saxon America to protect herself at home [from these foreigners] and to demonstrate her mastery [of them] abroad."<sup>1</sup> In such a climate, when those perceived as foreigners—appearing in a range of figures from the colonial subject to the immigrant worker to the black citizen—threaten to become America itself, it is not surprising, however ironic, that a new American superhero, heir to the frontier individualism of Natty Bumppo, should be an English nobleman, epitome of the Anglo-Saxon race, John Clayton the second, Lord Greystoke, alias Tarzan of the Apes. Nor is it surprising that in an age when the United States was beginning to seek new frontiers in expansionist adventures abroad that the scene of action for this Anglo-Saxon hero would be an American wilderness displaced to a fantasized European colonial Africa. In this way Americans could savor, in the act of denying, their own imperial ventures.

"The object lesson" of expansion is, [Teddy Roosevelt] declared, "that peace must be brought about in the world's waste spaces. . . . Peace cannot be had until the civilized nations have expanded in some shape over the barbarous nations." . . . "It is our duty toward the people living in barbarism to see that they are freed from their chains," he told Minnesotans a fortnight before he became President [in 1901], "and we can free them only by destroying barbarism itself. . . . Exactly as it is the duty of a civilized power scrupulously to respect the rights of weaker civilized powers . . . so it is its duty to put down savagery and barbarism."<sup>2</sup>

We can translate "civilized" in Roosevelt's parlance as Anglo-Saxon, or white, and "savagery and barbarism" as the state of every people beyond that pale. For Roosevelt subscribed to that version of the myth of Anglo-Saxon superiority that saw the American people as the apotheosis

of this race of races. The imperialist foreign policy that this myth buttressed began, in the twentieth century, with the war with Spain; its formative beginnings, however, were in that expansion across the continent that commenced officially with the establishment of the Jamestown colony in 1607, then steadily and violently displaced the Indians westward, momentarily culminating in the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890, before extending in fact and vision beyond the geographical limits of the United States. A strain of American thought throughout the nineteenth century, this myth of racial superiority, particularly under the influence first of Darwinism and then, at the turn of the century, of the new science of genetics, "became," as John Higham notes, "permeated with race feelings. Increasingly, Anglo-Saxon culture seemed to depend on the persistence of a physical type. Nationalism was naturalized; and 'race' in every sense came to imply a biological determinism" (46). Howard K. Beale writes that lecturing at Oxford in 1910, Roosevelt "defined 'the so-called white races' as 'the group of peoples living in Europe, who undoubtedly have a certain kinship of blood, who profess the Christian religion, and trace back their culture to Greece and Rome'" (27). "Yet," Beale argues, "he was unlike many racists in that he laid these differences of 'race' to acquired characteristics and to the effect of geographic environment" (29). Roosevelt's invocation of "blood" as a determinant of racial difference must ironize Beale's apologia, particularly given an intellectual climate in which, since the beginning of the nineteenth century and the naturalization—or, more particularly, the *biologization*—of race, such an invocation could only signal the petrification of racial hierarchy, the resistance of racial "types" to assimilation or homogenization. Nevertheless, we must recognize a progressive strain in this imperial foreign policy, one that apparently welcomes homogenization, but—and here homogeneity harmonizes itself with hierarchy—only in the terms of the policy maker, who writes a script in which the other, in order to be heard, must say: "for your sake I have become a civilized man . . . for your sake I will be whatever you will me to be."

This script is neither a uniquely twentieth-century one nor uniquely American. Scrutinizing the history of the script, which is the project of this book, allows us to represent the United States not as an unprecedented phenomenon, which is the way American ideology typically represents it, but as the apotheosis of its Western European past, its projection or shadow. From its ideological inception or, if you will, its

"discovery," America was Western Europe's dream of immediate or absolute power. Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, with its imperial vision of Prospero acting magically to bring political order to the frontier between the Old and the New World manifests even as it ironizes the dream; for in order to realize itself, Prospero's immediate, or magical, power must be mediated by the figures that are its object: Caliban, Ariel, and Miranda. And the United States that emerges from America is Europe's alibi for this dream, even as Western Europe in this (what do we call it?) postcolonial or neocolonial world appears to have given up this dream, like Prospero promising to renounce his magic, while gesturing toward a home we never see him return to at the end of the drama.

In his *Discourse of Western Planting* (1584), which marks the moment of, by supplying the rationale for, a full-scale English commitment to colonizing North America, the younger Richard Hakluyt gave us an instrumental version of this script of foreign policy when he informed his royal reader, Queen Elizabeth, that, according to the authoritative reports of certain European voyagers, Native Americans "are very easie to be perswaded, and doo all that they sawe the Christians doo in their devine service with like imitation and devotion, and were very desirous to become Christians." All it would take to realize this desire, Hakluyt went on to say, would be for the English to "plant[ . . . ] one or two Colonies of our nation uppon that fyrme . . . and firste learne the language of the people nere adjoyninge (the gifte of tongues beinge nowe taken awaye), and by little and little acquainte themselves with their manner, and so with discrecion and myldenes distill into their purged myndes the swete and lively liquor of the gospell. . . ."<sup>3</sup> Twenty-five years later, in 1609, with the memory of the failure of Roanoke still quite alive and Jamestown on the brink of failure, *Instructions* from the London Council of the Virginia Company (in which Hakluyt was a principal stockholder) ordered Sir Thomas Gates, prospective interim governor of the colony, to institute a plan, using force if necessary, for educating the children of *weroances* (Algonquian leaders) "in [the English] language, and manners"; for "if you intreate well and educate those which are younge and to succede in the government in your Manners and Religion, their people will easily obey you and become in time Civill and Christian."<sup>4</sup>

Between the *Discourse* of 1584 and the *Instructions* of 1609 experience has intervened. (The Indians, apparently, are not so desirous of becoming Christians; in fact they are resistant; moreover, at this stage the

English find themselves dependent on the Indians' technological expertise for survival, a blow to English fantasies of immediate power.) And this intervention, as we can read, is marked by a shift in the strategy of translation, a strategy that, as I want to suggest, is at the heart of Anglo-America's expansionist foreign policy from its inception to the present. In the *Discourse*, it is the colonists who will learn the "language of the people" (in actuality, the languages of the peoples; already a certain homogenous image of the other is in place), while in the *Instructions*, it is the Indians who must learn English.

We might consider this shift moot, because in both cases the object is to convert the Indians into English men and women, that is, to Protestant Christians (and in this case national and religious identity are identical). But, it seems to me, the shift is crucial. For it shows us that in the years intervening between the *Discourse* and the *Instructions* the English have rewritten the script of this foreign policy so that only those who speak English, and "standard" English at that, will have a voice, or a place, in this script (in Chapter 5 I define the parameters of "standard" English in the sixteenth century). The problem of translation, the complex interactions between cultures and histories, is at once announced and annulled. This rewriting has significant repercussions in the conflict between oral and written cultures under consideration here. And we can read these repercussions in the European travel narratives, where what were necessarily the difficulties, discords, indeed, absences of translation, are displaced into fictive accords of communication, composed, except for a scattering of transliterated native terms, wholly in European tongues. Such an accord, for example, constitutes the reasoning of the important and well-known propaganda pamphlet, *A True Declaration of the Estate of the Colonie in Virginia* (1610), issued by the London Council of the Virginia Company. "There is no other, moderate, and mixt course, to bring [the Virginia Algonquians] to conuersion," the pamphlet announces, "but by dailie conuersation, where they may see the life, and learne the language each of other."<sup>5</sup> It is not simply the phrase "to bring them to conuersion" that annuls the announcement of intercultural communication ("and learne the language each of other"); it is that throughout this discourse, which is an argument for, by way of a narrative of, English colonization in Virginia, the Indians speak unquestionably in English political and economic terms. Thus *A True Declaration* tells us that the English are lawfully in Virginia "chiefly because *Paspehay*, one of their Kings, sold vnto vs for copper, land to inherit and inhabite.



*Powhatan*, their chiefe King, receiued voluntarilie a crown and a sceptre, with a full acknowledgment of dutie and submission." In dressing up its savages in royal array, this discourse never asks what the problems in translation might be in rendering *king*, *sceptre*, and *crown* into the Algonquian languages, nor does it register the impossibility of translating the English notion of "selling land" into these languages, which did not contain the concept of land as *property*, that is, as an alienable commodity. And yet, as we know, even at this relatively early moment of contact, the colonists, through the intermediacy of translators from both European and Native American cultures, were at least beginning to be aware of crucial cultural differences in the economic and political realms. One of the first accounts that we have from Virginia, for example, remarks in an idiom that typifies early European perceptions of kinship-based American cultures that "the inhabitantes have . . . no comerce with any nation, no respect of proffitt, neither is there scarce that we call meum et tuum among them save only the kinges know their owne territoryes, & the people their severall gardens . . ." (Barbour, 1, 101). While we must read this protoanthropology as at least in part a projection of European "golden age" mythology on what Europeans understood, ideologically, as the tabula rasa of the New World, we must also acknowledge that this anthropology began to translate, however ethnocentrically, the crucial difference between what Eric Wolf, following Marx, has termed the kin-ordered mode of production and modes of production he refers to as tributary (of which a mercantilist feudalism would be the prime Western form) and capitalist (73–100).<sup>6</sup> The difference (which I will discuss at some length in Chapter 3) is that the latter two modes are characterized by the alienation of labor from the means of production (in this case, centrally, the land).<sup>7</sup> And this alienation produces a particular version of *meum et tuum* (what "we call meum et tuum"), which is significantly different from what *they* (kin-ordered societies) appear to translate *meum et tuum* as in their languages. Invoking the violence of the General Allotment Act of 1887, which sought to shift Indian landholdings from a communal to a private basis, Jimmie Durham, a Cherokee, comments on this significant difference: "The mere concept of parcels of owned land is an insult to Cherokees. . . . Talking about it is impossible; in our own language the possessive pronouns can only be used for things that you can physically give to another person, such as, 'my woodcarving,' 'my basket.'" <sup>8</sup>

In the political realm as well, the early English colonists seem to have

been aware of significant cultural differences, even as they translated these differences into their terms. So, in the matter of "*Powhatan*, their chiefe King, receiu[ing] voluntarilie a crown," a ceremony that took place in the fall of 1608 in Powhatan's village of Werowocomoco, John Smith, who in his own writing routinely translates Algonquian political relationships into English terms, remarks in *A Map of Virginia* (1612) "what a fowle trouble there was to make him kneele to receaue his crowne, he neither knowing the maiestie, nor meaning of a Crowne" (Barbour, 2, 414). There were, as we know, translators from both cultures who could have explained to Powhatan the meaning of a crown, if he didn't already know its meaning all too well after more than a year of dealing with the English in Virginia. But that, I take it, is not the point. That is, we are not to read Smith's statement, with its ambiguous sarcasm (is he mocking what he takes to be English or Indian ignorance?) entirely literally. It is, rather, a sign, however incipient, of the difficulty of translating the Algonquian *weroance*, because of its inseparability from a kin-ordered mode of production, into the English *king* or *emperor* (another frequent designation of Powhatan), because of the inseparability of these terms from tributary or emergent capitalist modes.<sup>9</sup>

Unless we are attentive to the repressed problem of translation, narratives of the type that *A True Declaration* represents will continue to teach us what they have taught us: to forget the other side of the story. Indeed, what we have today, growing out of and perpetuating the dynamics of these narratives, is a foreign policy of forgetfulness. We can read the contemporary form of these dynamics in a foreign-policy message delivered to Congress on March 14, 1986. Employing a certain contemporary liberal rhetoric that apparently recognizes the integrity of postcolonial polities, Ronald Reagan gives a passing nod to "the diversity of regional conflicts and of the conditions in which they arise. Most of the world's turbulence has indigenous causes," he goes on to say, "and not every regional conflict should be viewed as part of the East-West conflict." Yet the rest of his message betrays this apparent commitment to recognizing the integrity of cultural and historical diversity, for it reduces all conflicts to a figure of this "East-West conflict." In the world at large, as it is figured in this rhetoric, everyone is ultimately either a citizen of the Soviet Union (inevitably "an evil empire") or of the United States (the home of true civilization). While Reagan tells Congress that "[t]he drive for national freedom and popular rule takes different forms in different countries, for each nation is the authentic

product of a unique history and culture," he is simultaneously (and apparently unconsciously) translating all the "forms" of "national freedom and popular rule" into one form, that of capitalist democracy. And, as we know, in the often fantastic language of U.S. domestic and foreign policy, *democracy* and *capitalism*, whatever their actual contradictions, are synonymous. Thus while Reagan nods to a world of cultural and historical pluralism—the world that is actually out there in all its complexity, beyond his superficial evocation of it—he projects, and implicitly threatens to realize, a world of steadily increasing homogeneity, inhabited by "the growing ranks of those who share our interests and values."<sup>10</sup>

What the English and Europeans could not achieve in actuality they achieved textually in these early narratives: the translation of the Indians into proper English. But as the balance of power shifted from Indians to Europeans—and in America this shift was rapid and massive after the Revolution had shattered the Iroquois's power—these narratives became models of actuality, models for legal decisions in which the Indians were literally forced to speak proper English, to speak, that is, whether they could speak English or not, in the letter of a law that recognized only the terms of *property*. The Indians "were admitted to be the rightful occupants of the soil, with a legal as well as just claim to retain possession of it, and to use it according to their own discretion," Chief Justice John Marshall wrote in 1823, in the course of articulating the Supreme Court's opinion in *Johnson and Graham's Lessee v. M'Intosh*, a case, explicitly grounded in the early narratives I have been reviewing, that upheld a lower court decision invalidating Indians' rights to sell land to individuals; "but," Marshall continued, "their rights to complete sovereignty, as independent nations, were necessarily diminished, and their power to dispose of the soil at their own will, to whomsoever they pleased, was denied by the original fundamental principle that discovery gave exclusive title to those who made it." The letter of the law violently blurs the frontier between foreign and domestic policy, as it articulates the crucial western distinction between *possession* and *title*. The Indians comprise foreign nations that, nevertheless, because they are not entirely foreign—that is, sovereign—must speak in domestic terms, terms that ironically allow the Indians "to be the rightful occupants of the soil, with a legal as well as just claim to retain possession of it," so that they can be legally dispossessed of it; "the original fundamental principle" of European "discovery" grants *title* to the occupying Western powers, as if the

Indians' prior arrival in America did not itself constitute a "discovery." Because of their "savagery," the Indians, the Marshall Court claimed in 1823, could neither be assimilated to Western culture nor governed "as a distinct people."<sup>11</sup> They were, as Marshall made explicit in an 1831 decision, "domestic dependent nations."<sup>12</sup> Neither foreign nor domestic (neither themselves nor us) in the legal documents that translated them inescapably into English, the Indians were compelled by these documents to speak this English, but without the crucial legal rights to property that this English conveyed to its European speakers.

This notion of "domestic dependent nations," which, as Vine Deloria, Jr., and Clifford Lytle suggest, still haunts U.S.-Indian relations (2-4), even after the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, appears also to haunt, to be the implicit vision of, U.S. foreign policy in the twentieth century, as this policy has conjured and continues to conjure the Hispanics, Asians, and Arabs of the Middle East whom it addresses. For no matter how delusory this vision may appear in a postcolonial world, U.S. foreign policy still seems unable to deal with these peoples as integral, different entities, speaking their own languages. Rather, they remain in our official documents and in the media strange hybrids, neither themselves nor us, translated into an English that rinsed of its complexities offers these apparitions only two postures of the same language, the speech of the savage ("I will devour you entire") or the speech of the convert: "I have come across the ages out of the dim and distant past from the lair of the primeval man to claim you—for your sake I have become a civilized man—for your sake I have crossed oceans and continents—for your sake I will be whatever you will me to be."

These are the words of Tarzan's marriage proposal to Jane Porter, the Baltimore woman who with her "delicate . . . snowy skin" (140) holds the most powerful sway over Tarzan, representing for him, like Miranda for that archetypal imperialist Prospero, everything in "civilization" that must be protected from the apes and black Africans, latter-day Calibans, who, in addition to two gangs of mutinous sailors (defined by their speech as conspicuously lower class), are the villains of the novel. Indeed, these "ignorant, half-brute" (12) sailors, representative of the working class in the novel, along with Jane's black maid, Esmeralda, who is also portrayed, though for comic relief, as an ignorant half-brute, are relegated to the realm of the foreign inhabited by the apes and the Africans, when in characterizing "a crude message printed almost illegibly [by the mutineers], and with many evidences of an unac-

customed task," Burroughs tells us that it must be "[t]ranslated" (10) by Tarzan's upper-class parents, for whom it is intended as a warning not to interfere in the mutiny that sets the action of the novel going. In this imperial romance the lower class is as much a foreign country to the upper class as Africa is to Europe.

The irony of Tarzan's proposal is that to "become a civilized man" he already has to be one, the son of Lord and Lady Greystoke, who, sailing to Africa in 1888 to pursue Lord Greystoke's work for the British Colonial Office, are abandoned on an island off the African coast by the mutinous sailors (led by a fleeting character named, appropriately enough, given the way the romance blends its racist and class politics, Black Michael). It is here that the young Lord Greystoke is born. His mother soon dies of the prolonged trauma induced by what we can fairly call, given the miscegenist fantasies of the book, an attempted rape (Lady Greystoke in a swoon shoots the perpetrator) by one of the male apes of the primal horde of Kerchak; he subsequently kills Tarzan's father, leaving the infant nobleman, ignorant of his identity, an orphan to be raised by his parents' killers. Twenty-one years later, in 1909 (the last year of Teddy Roosevelt's administration), Tarzan meets Jane, who, like his parents, has been abandoned on the island by mutineers, along with her father (Professor Archimedes Q. Porter) and a small group of others, including her suitor, Tarzan's cousin, William Cecil Clayton, who, ignorant of the existence of the rightful Lord Greystoke, has assumed the title himself. After a series of adventures, one of which recalls the attempted rape of Tarzan's mother (Tarzan rescues Jane from the clutches of the ape Terkoz, son of Tublat, Tarzan's foster-father, whom Tarzan has killed earlier in the novel in a barely veiled Oedipal scene), Tarzan follows Jane to America, and, after saving her from a forest fire in Wisconsin and thwarting the designs of an unwanted suitor (the American Robert Canler), makes his proposal of marriage.

But Jane must refuse the proposal, even though she wants to accept it. Plagued by doubts about Tarzan's identity (none of the characters know who he actually is, and Tarzan himself lacks one crucial piece of evidence to complete the puzzle) and seeing in his cousin William Clayton "a man trained in the same school of environment in which she had been trained—a man with social position and culture such as she had been taught to consider as the prime essentials to congenial association" (242), Jane has just promised to marry the present Lord Greystoke. Now, though her deepest or "primeval" feelings prompt her toward Tarzan,

her sense of honor toward "a good man" (244), who, like her mysterious suitor, also loves her, prompts her more strongly to keep her promise.

The irony of redundancy in Tarzan's proposal, that a man must be civilized in order to be civilized, is emphasized in Jane's refusal. For what can we say at the end of this romance but that Jane turns down Lord Greystoke to marry Lord Greystoke. In terms of the racial and class politics that structure the romance, in which readers, knowing the identity of Tarzan, can be titillated by the threat of racial, species, or class miscegenation (all of which are figures for one another in the novel) without ever facing the fact of miscegenation, Jane is safe in any case. Emphasizing this safety, a telegram from Tarzan's friend and mentor D'Arnot arrives just *after* the nick of time, with the final piece of proof of Tarzan's identity: "Fingerprints prove you Greystoke. Congratulations" (244). As in Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), it is fingerprints, which appear under the aegis of the biological, that finally and apparently definitively separate the savage from the civilized, black from white, ape from man, commoner from noble; yet, as the fingerprinter in Burroughs's romance admits, fingerprints can distinguish individuals, "but the science has not progressed sufficiently to render it exact enough in such matters" (222) as species, or racial, identification. We should remember that in *Tarzan*, as in all racist ideologies, the line between race and species, between, that is, the human and the animal or the cultural and the natural is radically blurred. Although Tarzan now has "proof" of his noble identity, he must nobly suppress it for the sake of Jane, whom he has promised to help "bear the burden" of her "choice." He also realizes that if he were to make his noble identity public, it would not only dispossess William Clayton of "his title and his lands and his castles . . . it would take them away from Jane Porter also" (244). So in the final lines of the romance, when Lord Greystoke asks Tarzan, "If it's any of my business, how the devil did you ever get into that bally jungle?", Tarzan, nobly concealing his noble identity, replies, "I was born there. . . . My mother was an Ape, and of course she couldn't tell me much about it. I never knew who my father was" (245).

Caught up in a nostalgia for the noble individualism that Tarzan's act represents here, the reader, presumably, is not intended to worry about the politics of class that this individualism mystifies. And what could locate this romance in America more than the figure of individualism mystifying the figure of class? The reader, that is, is not intended to worry about the dispossession of either colonial subjects or the working class by