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Nature in the New World: From Christopher Columbus to Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo. By Antonello Gerbi. Translated by Jeremy Moyle. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985. xviii + 462 pp. Appendix, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth.)

In 1532, Emperor Charles V commissioned a history of his New World dominions. The result, the *Historia general y natural de la Indias* by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, was a remarkable commentary on the European perception of the physical environment encountered in the Americas and was fundamentally different from all previous studies. Jeremy Moyle's deft translation of this work by one of Italy's leading intellectual historians complements his earlier rendering of Gerbi's *The Dispute of the New World* (1973). While in the earlier study Gerbi examined eighteenth and nineteenth century attitudes, the present book delves into the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries' views on the New World. Part 1, "From Columbus to Verrazzano," which comprises one-third of the book, summarizes and explores the character of descriptions of the New World by eleven individuals. Included among the writers are men who traveled to the new lands, such as Columbus, Pigafetta, Cortés, and others, principally Peter Martyr, who based his work on probing conversations with people returning from the Indies and thorough investigation of what they brought back to Spain with them. Gerbi argues that all these commentators on the American scene shared one trait—they were looking through a European prism that colored everything they saw. The extraordinarily rich variety of American flora and fauna was usually described with reference to Europe. A New World plant or animal was similar to or different from a European one; it was better or worse.

In many respects, part 1 is an extended prologue to part 2. The second section of the book, the remaining two-thirds of text, deals extensively with Fernández de Oviedo and his work. As a young man, he traveled in Italy, where he became acquainted with and influenced by Italian humanism, so much so that Gerbi stated that Oviedo was "an early sixteenth-century Italian in his mentality." Beginning in 1514, Oviedo spent much of the rest of his life in the Indies, although he returned to Spain no fewer than six times before his death in Santo Domingo in 1557.

Gerbi provides a capsule biography of Oviedo and attempts to evaluate the literary merit of his work by discussing such themes as his use of irony, his artistic originality, and his self-deprecating humor. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Oviedo will ever enjoy a reputation as a creator of great literature—his often tortured and almost impenetrable Spanish will see to that—but that is unimportant.

Oviedo was attempting to record rational scientific data that was based on experimentation and first-hand observation, and in this he was largely

successful. Moreover, what sets Oviedo apart from all those who had gone before was his point of view. For Oviedo, the New World was only new in the sense that Europeans had recently learned of its existence. It was neither better nor worse than the Old World; rather it was different.

General readers may find Gerbi's exhaustive annotation daunting. Those unfamiliar with the texts under discussion may find themselves seeking out the original. Still, this volume belongs on the shelf of all serious Americanists.

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Stedman's Surinam: Life in an Eighteenth-Century Slave Society. Edited by Richard Price and Sally Price. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992. lxxv + 350 pp. Map, illustrations, notes, references. \$19.95 paper, \$60.00 cloth).

This eyewitness account of an eighteenth-century slave society in a Dutch colony was popularized with the publication of twenty editions based on the 1796 *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* by John Gabriel Stedman. The book was also published in several different languages, making it an important work in the anti-slavery body of literature. Although Joseph Johnson, the original publisher, agreed to publish Stedman's work, the author was unhappy with the final product. He angrily depicted the book as "mard" and "full of lies and nonsense."

Richard and Sally Price, in their 1988 critical edition, revealed to what extent the 1796 edition was compromised. Their edition, along with this 1992 abridgment of the same and with the help of Stedman's original handwritten manuscript, demonstrates the numerous discrepancies between what Stedman actually wrote and the 1796 version that appeared in print.

Stedman's candid observations of the brutality toward the slave population exhibited by plantation owners and others in the colony are appalling, but serve us well in revealing the desensitized and decadent society of the eighteenth-century Dutch colony. The enriched modern edition of 1988 and this 1992 abridged edition go further, with the help of Richard and Sally Price, in expressing the true sentiment of John Gabriel Stedman.

It is not known to what extent Johnson was privy to the more than editorial changes William Thomson, the original editor, made to Stedman's manuscript, but the significance of the changes cannot be denied. Although Thomson deleted references to nudity, sex, and Stedman's contempt of his