

CLASSICAL MEETS COLONIAL: AN EXPLORATION OF THE TRAVEL NARRATIVES OF  
GEORGE BEST

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**“That naked and wylde nation, fyghtinge onely with stones and clubbes...”**

The classical concept of the civilized community, or the *civitas*, plays a crucial role in understanding how English explorers approached the New World and its peoples, as documented in the travel narratives that chronicle these meetings. The 1578 narrative of George Best, *A true discourse of the late voyages of discoverie, for the finding of a passage to Cathaya, by the Northwest, under the conduct of Martin Frobisher...*,<sup>1</sup> frames the New World in an Aristotelian context and treats the concept of civilization according to the principles of classical philosophy. In addition, Best works to exclude the Inuit peoples from this civilization by depicting them as unnatural and uncontrollable. Best works in concert with contemporary records, such as those of historian John Stowe, and his approach is echoed in Elizabethan travel narratives by Richard Eden and Thomas Ellis, the latter of whom wrote an independent account of Frobisher’s third voyage. Eden compiled and translated travel narratives by a variety of Europeans. Stowe chronicled daily life in London during the Renaissance and confirms the values that Best advocates. While biographical information on Best is scant, we know that he accompanied Martin Frobisher on his second and third voyages in 1577 and 1578 to what is today Newfoundland. He chronicled these voyages and summarized the first, presumably based on conversations with Frobisher and his crew. Looking for the Northwest Passage, the explorers summered in what is now Frobisher Sound. While there, they interacted with several groups of native Inuit peoples, including the Inuktitut.

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<sup>1</sup> I have modernized Best’s spelling only enough to make the text readily understandable to a modern reader. Specifically, I have replaced *vv* with *w*, *f* with *s*, *u* with *v*, and *i* with *j*, as appropriate.

While Best and Ellis are only loosely related to Stowe and Eden, each author frames his understanding of community based on the Aristotelian sense of civilized existence. Each author engages the *Meta Incognita* – the “unknown shore” – and attempts to figuratively remove its inhabitants from the civilized world. While certainly there are differences among these writers, the similarities reveal a combative and patterned approach to New World inhabitants (or those who do not live in the European metropolis, in the case of Stowe). Each judges the non-European in terms of the English identity and sense of civilization, which was heavily influenced by the classical ideas that governed the role and responsibility of empire, decided the position of the foreigner or slave, and defined what was considered civil.

“The main thrust has always been to relate America to the established norms of the Old World” (35), argues critic Peter Hulme, and historian Anthony Pagden asserts that the empires in America were “attempts to perpetuate the traditions and the values of the empires of the ancient world” (5). To locate these norms, the writers of Renaissance England reached back to Aristotle and Cicero. The metropolis of Renaissance Europe was predicated on ancient Athens and Rome, which were the ancient world centers of civilization. Elizabethans were “schooled in the alien values of Greco-Roman antiquity” (17), writes Richard Helgerson, and classical philosophy defined their expectations of civilization. I show that the classical model heavily influences how Best, specifically, treats the idea of civilization, especially as it relates to acquisition, labor, control, and most importantly, the very nature of the Inuit peoples.

In his introduction, Best states,

The arte of war is nowe growen to that excellencie, that if *Achilles*, *Alexander* the Great, *Julius Caesar*, and other, shoulde come in these later dayes, they themselves would more admire & wonder at the courages of our men, their engines, and their policies in warre, than the ignorant and barbarous multitude in their days did to them. (28)

In this passage, Best uses ancient Rome and Greece as the precedent, the measuring sticks against which to compare early modern English (and Inuit) society. In his narratives, he seeks to displace the ancient world and surpass it, which is not only achieved through the modern civitas but also through the dispersal of that civilization. “The discovery of the Americas is the key event which illustrates that the moderns have supplanted the ancients and established their own time... a clean break with the past” (87), Andrew Hadfield contends in his examination of Renaissance travel writing. Best writes, “within the memorie of man within these foure-score yeares, there hath beene more newe countries and regions discovered than in five thousande yeares before” (30). Here, he infers that early modern European (especially English) civilization has surpassed the ancient world in discovery in a remarkably short time, primarily because of technological advances, and the author does not seem to grasp technology as an iterative phenomenon indebted to previous advancements. Instead, English ingenuity is responsible for such achievements. Does this make his reliance on ancient philosophy problematic? Not even Hercules had matched the accomplishments of the English, “having come so farre Westward, contented himselfe, and said: *Non plus ultra*, no further” (Best 31). Of course, Best fails to consider the barriers to technological advancement faced by the Inuit, including necessity, desire, and geographic isolation, nor

does he consider less obvious technical achievements more appropriate to the New World, such as farming and hunting.

In accordance with the literature of ancient Greece, Best presents his narrative in epic form. Frobisher, the “valiante Generall Captayne” (Best 40) is elevated to the status of epic hero and war maker who establishes a traveling kingdom unto itself – complete with laws and punishments, authorities, and assigned roles. If preservation of the status quo, national pride, violence, and the ultimate representation of stability are the qualities associated with epic (Helgerson 154-5), *A true discourse* reinforces them. Best emphasizes servant/master relations, the superiority of the English state, and the authority of the monarch.

Best’s text depicts the incompatibilities between these groups, Old and New, European and indigenous, civilized and savage, but also with admiration and fascination, a dichotomy difficult to resolve. *A true discourse* in many ways reads as a celebration of Aristotelian thought, and it is through *The Politics* by Aristotle that we can understand many of the author’s choices and motivations. Best is obviously highly literate and shows a keen awareness not only of Aristotle but of other classical thinkers, and it would fair to surmise that Best read works by the philosopher. Not merely a recorder, he is an *observer* with a well-rounded intellect. Regardless, the latter was affected by the former in the sense that Aristotle was highly influential in Renaissance thought.

Aristotle’s *civitas* was a community or a group that supplied the resources required to establish what he considered the *good life*, or the *perfect life*, a happy and

virtuous existence in which all needs are met without undue toil. It was diverse but structured, learned and self-sufficient. Its people possessed a common spirit, and the community provided protection. The Inuit also play an active and substantial role in the shape of the English civitas – either as a group against which to define the term *community* or one that will actually supply the resources required to establish the good life for the English colonizers who would come later.

It should come as no surprise that classical ideas are so influential in *A true discourse*. In “The Legacy of Rome,” Pagden links the nature of empire and colonization in early modern Europe to classical Roman and Grecian modes. Those standards become part of *A true discourse*. Best takes pains to compare modern England with ancient Greece and Rome, linking it to the classical ideal. In a passage I cite below, he mentions no fewer than seven classical theorists (Tullie, Solon, Lycurgus, Aristotle, Cicero, Demosthenes, and Euclide) in addition to various unnamed “others.” Aristotle is cited more than once by Best and by Thomas Ellis. Like Best, who calls upon “the sage philosophers[,] the fathers of eloquence” (Ellis A.iii), Stowe mentions Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero as he extols the virtues of living in the European metropolis.

### **“Oure Englishe nation...”**

A defined sense of community was important to early modern England. Following a period of upheaval and monarchial turbulence in the 1550s, the long rule of Elizabeth meant a certain continuity, stability, and definition of identity (religious, for

example), however porous, multiple, and mutable that identity was. Renaissance England shows, partially through its surge in literature and standardization of tongue, a more unified community, one that is burgeoning with awareness of itself, of nationhood. Helgerson points out that a national identity was becoming an important goal during this period (3-4), and it was during the same century that England broke from one empire, the Roman Catholic Church, to become an empire unto itself. It was a more centralized and structured England, as shown in its emphasis on hierarchy. Best seeks to bring this order to the New World. The voyages are, as he puts it, “for the good and discrete order of government” (24).

Beginning in the Elizabethan era, “things English came to matter with a special intensity” (Helgerson 3). *A true discourse* reveals a pattern of burgeoning nationalism that is no doubt enhanced by English competition with France, Portugal, and Spain, the latter serving as a model, motivator (Helgerson 182), and enemy that threatened to subsume England and the English sense of identity. One purpose of the state is to enable its inhabitants to “provide against their own enslavement” (Aristotle 1333b41), and the acquisition of resources in the New World or a trading route would afford just that kind of protection. Certainly, competition was an important factor; it was the “conditioning element” (Helgerson 182) that influenced England’s expansionist policy. *A true discourse* shows that group identity is largely synonymous with the common spirit that Aristotle advocates when he argues that revolution occurs when the unity of the state is

not preserved (1303b8-9). Best strives to reinforce this common identity in his accounts, coupling it with a sense of pride and shared experience:

Man is borne not only to serve his owne turne (as *Tullie* sayeth) but hys kinsfolke, friends, and the common wealth especially... sundry men finding themselves as it were tyed by this bond and dutie of humane society, have willinglye endeavoured sundry ways, to shew themselves profitable members of their common weale. Some men by study of the minde, have employed themselves to give out good lawes and ordinances for government, as *Solon*, *Lycurgus*, and others. Some have spented their time in devising Artes and Sciences, for the better sharpening of Mans witte, and the easier expressing his conceytes, as in tyme past *Aristotle* for Logike and Philosophie, *Cicero* and *Demosthenes* for Rethoricke, *Euclide* and others for Arithmeticke and Geometrie. (Best 26)

Best writes in an English that has largely dispensed with the foreign elements of French and Latin, a language that has become much more patterned, predictable, and cohesive, like the Elizabethan community that it served.

This passage is revealing. First, it emphasizes membership in a larger group and promotes a sense of duty among its members to that larger whole. Not just a privilege, membership (and its obligations) is a *natural* responsibility (“Man is borne... tyed by this bond and dutie of humane society”). On this point, Aristotle would no doubt agree, famously noting that it is expected that man exist within a state: “it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal” (1253a2-3). In other words, it is a natural phenomenon that man would congregate in a state and that he is, by nature, of the *polis*, which was “at the first invented, to the end that men might lead a civil life” (Stowe 200). Aristotle contends that “the state is a creation of nature and prior to the individual” (1253a25-6). “Prior to the individual” also elevates the state above any one person (or small groups of people), who could not be considered self-sufficient.

“Finding themselves tyed” also reveals this natural and inevitable bond to the community. More than a duty or privilege, it is a prescribed condition. What is natural, of course, can only be good, according to Aristotle. Although the philosopher argues against the “excessive unification” (1263b8) that Socrates advocates, he expresses the bond the civitas creates and the existence of the state as a “union” (1280b40) on multiple occasions, arguing that revolution results from attitudinal fragmentation in the state (1303b7-8). In 1587, less than a decade after *A true discourse* was published, Phillip de Mornay writes that “Men... ought even naturally to be united, by the communitie of their kind” (ii).

Best echoes the idea of devotion to the community throughout his narratives. For example, he denounces examiners of the gold ore discovered by Frobisher because they “sought secretly to have a lease at hir Majesties hands of those places, whereby to enjoy the masse of so great a publike profit unto their own private gaines” (Best 76). Private enterprise at the expense of public benefit is clearly condemned as a leach on the public well-being. We find it condemned in *The Politics*, as well. Aristotle also distinguishes between conventional wealth (the coin) and a more important kind of spiritual wealth within the community, the governance of which he compares to “the management of the household” (1253b1-3). Ergo, an effectively managed, efficient state is a happy and productive one, and this kind of wealth is just as valuable.

In turn, a humane society is built through communally beneficial labor. Civilization is embodied in men and women who “willingly endeavored” to benefit the

civitas. It is also a cooperative, which Best describes as “this bond and dutie of humane society.... for the better sharpening of mans witte,” not an individually-motivated endeavor. It is, as Best describes it, a “common weale.” Second, each citizen contributes something that can be recognized as an attribute of civil European society, be it the “artes and sciences” or policy and good governance. They labor for the good of the whole voluntarily, which in turn makes them *humane*.

Although Best might have simply spelled *human* with an *e* (a common variation), the term *humane* was understood in its modern sense during the 1500s. The two words share the same obvious root, so it would follow that humans are inherently humane, or good. To be inhuman was to be inhumane and inherently bad, an idea that will have important consequences for the Inuit. A century after Best, the Bishop Herbert Croft, in his correspondence with Andrew Marvell, would establish, in writing, a more specific link between *humane* and *civil*. Best’s contemporary Eden, who published a translation of Peter Martyr’s *Decades*, notes that the “inhabitauntes entertained them very frendly” and were a “humane people” (149). Here, Eden recognizes<sup>2</sup> the same link, albeit in a less definite way. If one must be human to have humane qualities, one must be human to be *civil*.

In the passage I quoted above, Best considers the community inclusive and diverse, where the artist, the politician, the philosopher, and the mathematician coexist and contribute to, and are vital for, the well-being of the other. This inclusiveness is

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<sup>2</sup> It is Eden who recognizes this because he can be considered to have corrupted the text substantially. All subsequent references are to him, although the text is credited to Peter Martyr in works cited.

mandated by Aristotle, who argues, “the nature of a state is to be a plurality.... a state is not made up only of so many men, but of different kinds of men; for similars do not constitute a state” (1261a18-25). Best would certainly agree with this statement, as his text makes clear the necessity of diversity and of leveraging the individual talents of the crew members for the benefit of the whole. His thorough record of the composition the crew reveals a broad cross section of the community. Helgerson writes, “People of all sorts, from the queen and her councillors to common soldiers and seamen, contributed to the Elizabethan expansion” (171). It is hard to imagine an endeavor more in need of more persons working toward a common goal than a dangerous Atlantic voyage. Best even models England as a diverse and egalitarian society, ready to embrace the indigenous peoples of the New World: “We also among us in England, have blacke Moores, Ethiopians, out of all partes of Torrida Zone” (44).

Returning to the passage, the inhabitants of the civitas are proud to labor and contribute to an ideal community (“good lawes”). Each citizen has a place in its composition and is a cog in the wheel. Each is one of the many “invincible mindes of oure Englishe nation” (19), as Best puts it. This learned society of brotherly citizens was necessary, Best suggests, because “there hath bin two speciall causes in former age, that have greatly hindered the English nation in their attempts. The one hath bin, lacke of liberalitie in the nobilitie, and the other want of skill in cosmographie, and the arte of navigation” (22). Stowe adds that “the liberal sciences and learnings of all sorts... do flourish only in peopled towns; without the which a realm is in no better case than a man

that lacketh both his eyes” (201). Blindness infers a type of spiritual and intellectual ignorance. Best recognizes that the community (of which the voyage is but an extension) will benefit from a variety of learned skills, so he takes it upon himself to study one:

When I first entended the voyage... for the finding of the passage to *Cataya* (beyng a matter in oure age above all other, notable) I applyed my selfe wholly to the science of cosmographie, and secrets of navigation, to the ende, I mighte enable my selfe the better for the service of my countrie. (17)

Learning and expertise, which was celebrated and cultivated during the Renaissance, enabled the success of both the discoverer and the nation. Aristotle agrees, arguing that the “desires of mankind,” or the good life that he so frequently references, “is impossible, unless a sufficient education is provided by the laws” (1266b30-32). In other words, the structure of the state must be such that it provides for mental enrichment, a tenet Best is unable to locate in Inuit society. Aristotle qualifies that statement by arguing that education must be equal in quality but diverse in scope, which corresponds to Best’s claim that certain specialties were inefficiently cultivated to enable previous English exploration. Best responds with a vision of a community with laws, art, philosophy, and science.

As we define civilization as a concept, it is important to consider its physical requirements. The Greek *civitas*, as Pagden explains, was rooted in the concept of empire, but it was contingent upon “a life lived in cities... the only place where virtue could be practiced” (18), which by definition was where ancient civilization existed. It was where people could flourish culturally, but it was also the only place in which they could do so (Pagden 18-19). As Stowe writes in his monumental 1598 *Survey of London*,

“these societies and assemblies of men in cities and great towns are a continual bridle against tyranny” (201). The city also conferred an ethical purpose onto the community (Pagden 19), and ethics require a general consensus. If the civitas is exported to the Americas, this means one jurisdiction, one source of authority, and one standard for civilized life, which the Inuit do not meet. According to Best, these laws exist not in the wilderness but in the city.

Best writes of one Captain Fenton, who explored

about tenne miles up into the countrey, where he perceived neyther towne, village, nor likelyhoode of habitation, but seemeth (as he sayeth) barrenous as the other parts which as yet we have entred upon; but their victuals and provision went so scant with them, that they had determined to re-turne homeward within seaven dayes after, if the fleete had not then arrived. (254)

Civilization here is judged by the presence (or lack) of permanent settlement, such as a “towne” or “village.” For Best, the city – the fixed and predictable collection of buildings and people – was where civilization existed. The nomadic Inuit peoples have no organized, permanent, or sophisticated dwelling and could therefore not be civil or in some ways, even human. They have houses, but these structures lack permanence and sophistication: “Their houses are but poore without, and sluttish ynough within...[they are] contented so poorely to live” (123), and they are sometimes found dwelling in caves. Lacking carpentry skills, “from the ground upward they builde with whales bones for lacke of timber” (Best 138), he writes. Best does not always distinguish between the availability of materials and the understanding or desire needed to use them; “for lacke of timber” in fact implies a deficiency in ability. As he makes clear at the end of the third voyage, timber is available. Such “barrenous” conditions make the “likelyhode of

habitation” scant, and Best suggests it is representative of all the land seen thus far. (This passage is from the third voyage.) With scarce provisions, the men must turn around; it is apparent that they cannot survive in this wild land. Stowe also writes of the dependency of man on the metropolis: “To change it were nothing else but to metamorphose the world, and to make wild beasts of reasonable men” (201), which is exactly how Best, Ellis, Eden, Richard Hakluyt, and other chorographers described the natives with whom they came into contact. The metropolis breeds brotherly interaction: “the love and goodwill of one man towards another, that also is closely bred and maintained in cities, where men by mutual society and companying together, do grow to alliances, commonalties, and corporations” (Stowe 201).

If identity is intrinsically tied to the state, it is important for Best to understand the state as noble and good. Its missions, therefore, must advance that good. On this point, Aristotle agrees:

Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for everyone acts in order to obtain that which they think is good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good. (1252a1-6)

If a state is naturally good, “the advantage of the state... [is] the common good of the citizens” (1283b41-2). As such, national goals, such as the discovery of a Northwest Passage, were to the benefit of every citizen, and every citizen was expected to work toward these aims.

His notion of the state – an independent community that furnishes its citizens with the good life – exists to provide “brotherhoods, common sacrifices, amusements

which draw men together” (Aristotle 1280b37-8) and other necessities, such as protection. The family, he argues, has already met the basic daily needs of its members; the purposes of the village and the state are higher.

**“One thyng I see which enforceth me to speake and lament, that the harvest is so great and the workemen so few...”**

If we have established that the English modeled their sense of community on values inherited from ancient Greece and Rome, the logical next step is to examine how Best projects that sense onto other peoples. Best uses the Aristotelian *civitas* to establish criteria for membership in the state. However, the citizen may be easier to define by exception; one who lacked too many attributes of the civilized individual would be excluded from the *civitas*. It is here that the membership becomes more fluid, but Aristotle admits as much: “we need only remark that the word ‘state’ is ambiguous” (1276a23-4).

To remove the Inuit from the *civitas*, Best leans heavily on the Aristotelian principle of self-sufficiency, which permeates *The Politics*. “The state is the union of families and villages in a perfect and self-sustaining life” (1280b40-1280a1), Aristotle writes. Best links this independence both to labor in the general sense and to cultivation, specifically. In Renaissance England, “The harder all men worked and the harder they had to work the better” (61), argues historian Edmund Morgan. While Best does not lambaste the Inuit for being idle (possibly because his extended encounters with them are

few), his descriptions of his fellow countrymen reveal what he values in character and make for useful comparison. (I discuss this below.)

Patricia Seed argues that the English identity came to be fixated on labor. She writes that “English colonists, who cherished their self-image as ‘laborers’ and capitalists, represented Indians as profoundly lacking in both” (115). As the *civitas* is a cooperative, so too is the labor that supports it. Furthermore, Seed identifies a connection between the English identity and the pleasant labor associated with paradise (129-31), and it is paradise that is frequently linked to the New World.

Like the English, the Orcadians<sup>3</sup>, whom Best encounters en route to North America, provide for their own subsistence, and the land “... yet yeeldeth some frutes, and sufficient mayntenance for the people” (Best 123). In other words, they practice methodical and organized agriculture, an important marker of civilization for Best. Their diets are cultivated: “For theyr bread, they have oaten cakes, and theyr drinke is ewes milke, and in some partes ale” (Best 123). In contrast, the Inuit men and women “eate rawe fleshe and fishe, and refuse no meate, howsoever it be stinking” (Best 283).

Best initially portrays North America as a rich resource for the English. Work is intimately linked to cultivation and *planting*, as Richard Hakluyt would refer to it, the literal sense of which is to farm, a critical part of English identity (Seed 126-7). The English desire to cultivate (in the agricultural sense) is referenced by Best: “Also here we sowed pease, corne, and other graine, to prove the fruitfulnessse of the soyle against the

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<sup>3</sup> That is, those from the present-day Orkney Islands

next yeare” (272). The figurative meaning of cultivation, however, conjures up the ideas of cultural refinement. This literal sewing of seeds is complemented by his desire to *plant* civilization in the Inuit: “to allure those brutish and uncivill people to courtesie we left therein dyvers of oure countrie toyes, as belles, and knives” (Best 272).

Work in *A true discourse* is emphasized in two major activities: the labor of the voyage, itself an undertaking the aboriginal peoples had not been able to accomplish, and the labor of profit. Best writes, “the gentlemen for example sake laboured hartily, and honestly encouraged the inferiour sorte to worke. So that small time of that little leasure, that was left to tarrie, was spent in vaine” (258). Instead, he paints the picture of a cooperative and mobile civitas led by the excellent men Aristotle describes, who appear to be ideal laborers: “There was none, that were eyther ydle or not well occupied” (238) on the voyages, Best writes, and the community aboard the ship does not permit for idling. The labor here is a means of attaining the good life promoted by Aristotle. “How pleasaunt and profitable it is, to attempt newe discoveries” (Best 16) hints at the fulfilling dimension of work.

What is less easily resolved, at least with the confines of *A true discourse*, is the benefit of a barren land, which Best describes as full of “greate mountaines of fleeting ise, with so great stormes of colde, with suche continuall snow on toppes of mountaines, and with such barren soyle, there being neither woodde or trees, but lowe shrubbes, and suche like” (68). Labor takes the form of pleasure (“hartily”), which is hard to reconcile with the unforgiving environment that Best records. More important to the author’s

perception of the natives, perhaps, is that the land is incapable of supporting the civilized life as it is lived in England. The very geographical features even seem to preclude civilization: “having passed about five miles, by such unweldie wayes, we returned unto oure ships, without sighte of any people, or likelyhoode of habitation” (Best 135).

Although the intellectual labor of preparation and “the searching wit of man” (28) is real enough, Best focuses on the physical tasks the crew must perform to stay alive and the manual labor needed to extract the ore and plant the community. When he is not engrossed with scientific phenomena or navigation, Best focuses on manual, active work. “Chorographies described the body of England. Voyages showed England in action” (152) notes Helgerson. Best was certain to catalogue an active society. Cicero adds, “Service is better than mere theoretical knowledge... It is essential, then, to human society” (*De Officiis* I.153).

The mere task of gathering ore is depicted as extremely gratifying for the explorers. Best writes that they

brought aboorde almost twoo hundreth tunne of golde ore, in the space of twentie dayes, every man therewithall wel comforted, determined lustilye to worke afreshe for a bo[o]ne voyage, to bring our labour to a speedie and happy ende... the men were wel wearied, so their shoes and clothes were well worne, their baskets bottoms torne out, their tooles broken, and the shippes reasonably well filled. Some with over-straining themselves received hurtes not a little daungerous, some having their bellies broken, and others their legges made lame. (152)

The workers may experience a sort of sexual thrill (“lustilye”) from labor. Its potentially orgasmic nature is further apparent in the end of work (“a speedie and happy ende”), the soiled clothing, and the phallic imagery, particularly the tools and lame legs.

Eden devotes much time to the subject, describing Caribbean islanders as “gyven rather to slepe, pley, and ydlenesse, then to laboure: and were more studious of sedition” (Arber 80). Idleness breeds sedition, a loaded word. If the Inuit are not mastered, they will rebel. The civitas is a defense for such rebellion, Stowe argues, writing that “the inhabitants [of a city] be a ready hand and strength of men, with munition to oppres intestine sedition” (201).

An inability or unwillingness to work is a detriment to character and disqualifies the individual in question for membership in the civitas: “And thus use the helpe and laboure of the inhabitantes both for the tyllage of theyr ground, and in theyr gold mines as thowghe they were... servauntes or bondemen. They beare this yoke of servitude with an evyll wyll” (Arber 104). The natives here labor as slaves, whom Cicero includes within civilization, but only because slavery is an assumed part of life. The “yoke” is a tether to labor. “They beare this yoke of servitude with an evyll wyll” signifies that the labor is (understandably) executed with reservation and displeasure. It will only be when labor is pleasurable and rewarding in itself that the natives will be eligible for manumission.

Eden portrays the natives as not only lazy but irrational and directionless at the same time:

The people of this Region are given to Idelnes and playe. For suche as inhabyte the mountaynes, syt quakyng for coulde in the winter season, and had rather soo wander uppe and downe Idelly, than take the peines to make them apparel, whereas they have wooddes full of gossampine cotton. (Arber 74)

They can harvest those resources only with the supervision and direction of the *political* colonists. Theorist Bernard Williams notes that Aristotle must have considered slaves unable to give direction but able to understand direction sufficiently (110). Here, Eden accuses the nomad not only of idling but also of being irrational and inefficient. With “playe,” he suggests wasted time that could be spent laboring. Like Best, he assumes the natives have the desire, the knowledge, and the technology to weave cotton. Why wander aimlessly to stay warm when the materials to make clothing are at hand? Both Best and Eden indict the natives for neglecting the precious resources available to them.

Aristotle uses a helpful analogy to explain how the explorers view the indigenous population in terms of labor production. “A family is more self-sufficing than an individual, and a city than a family, and a city only comes into being when the community is large enough to be self-sufficing” (1261b11-4), he argues. To work as an individual is to work inefficiently, and the indigenous peoples are inherently without a centralized labor structure. The natives in Best’s narrative exist at the individual level; when they are depicted in groups, they are not human at all, but spiders who scramble across the rocks<sup>4</sup>, moles who live in the earth<sup>5</sup>, and even porpoises<sup>6</sup> that frolic in the ocean. Although the natives work in concert in these instances, they are predators, not laborers. “For Englishmen, to labor was to be human, and not to labor was to be not

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<sup>4</sup> Best “sawe divers of the savages creeping behynde the rockes towardes our men” (149) and “for all the signes of friendship we coulede make them, they came still creeping towards us behinde the rockes to get more advantage of us” (150). Best realizes this image in the context of predatory spiders that creep across the rocks and fail to respond to civil communication.

<sup>5</sup> “They live in caves of the earth” (283), Best notes.

<sup>6</sup> Best records, “Upon the toppe of a hill, he perceived a number of small things fleeting in the sea afarre off, whyche hee supposed to be porposes or seales, or some kinde of strange fishe: but coming nearer, he discovered them to be men” (73).

quite human” (127), writes Seed. It is profound, Best asserts, that England’s citizens “have willingly endeavoured sundry ways, to shew themselves profitable members of their common weale” and to “have employed themselves” (26). They have labored, not for themselves, but for the whole. Despite his argument that the purpose of the civitas is a leisurely life, Aristotle agrees: “It is equally a mistake to place inactivity above action, for happiness is activity” (1325a31-2). He apparently shares with the English the view that labor can be pleasurable. Stowe links hard work with city life, explaining that “Good behaviour is yet called *urbanitas*, because it is rather found in cities than elsewhere” (201). The Inuit, of course, have no such city. In addition, the physical city is created by labor, and the absence of such a place in itself must have been influential in Best’s writing.

Mere hunting was not seen as labor, Seed notes (128-9); Best must have instead considered it animalized predator-on-prey activity. They “kill their pray” (283), Best writes, eating “raw fleshe and fishe, and greedily devoured the same before our mens faces” (73); they are unable to control themselves. Further, the texts do not account for the subsistence labor the Inuit must have performed, nor does it address labor related to religious ceremony or warfare, the former of which was idolatrous and worse than idleness, and the latter was (ironically) seen as a deficiency by equally war-hungry Europeans. Best describes the Inuit as a “very warlike” (282) people.

The natives’ inability to form a collective reduces their ability to labor. “Wealth and riches... are increased chiefly in towns and cities” (201), writes Stowe. What is

problematic for Best, however, is that the certain occupations necessary to maintaining the state are not to be performed by the civilized man. “The state which is best governed and possesses men who are just absolutely and not merely relatively to the principle of the constitution, the citizens must not lead the life of artisans or tradesmen, for such a life is ignoble and inimical to excellence” (1328b36-41), posits Aristotle. Here, Aristotle effectively condemns the life of the working class, but he does it in the view that the perfect life need not require toil. However, the perfect life is achieved through labor, and Best understands this:

I confesse that the Englishe have not hytherto had so ful successe of profit and commoditie of pleasaunt place (considering that the former nations have happily chanced to travel by more temperate clymates, where they had not onlye good meates and drinckes, but all other things necessarie for the use of man) the adventure the more hard the more honorable. (20)

Worth is measured by sheer labor, and the English have labored harder to achieve less, but Best gives the clear impression that work will continue until they achieve the end-state of “ful successe.” Thus, Best solves the contradiction.

**“Infidels like to be converted to Christianitie, in places where before the name of God hath not once bin hearde of...”**

Christianity was integral to the civilized identity inasmuch as the common spirit of a people was vital to the well-being of the Aristotelian civitas. “Another cause of revolution is difference of races which do not at once acquire a common spirit” (1303a26-7), Aristotle asserts. Those who were not Christian were not members of the

civilized society, according to Best, and he frequently returns to this criterion as a means by which to exclude the Inuit from the civitas.

By its nature, the metropolis from which Frobisher came was closely linked to religion. Stowe writes, “At once the propagation of religion, the execution of good policy... is best performed by towns and cities; and this civil life approacheth nearest to the shape of that mystical body whereof Christ is the head” (201). Here, Stowe parallels the state and paradise, which is also associated with labor. Not only is religion best practiced in the civitas; it is best understood and spread by the inhabitants thereof. Further, “this civil life,” which depended on the acceptance of Christ, engenders a paradise-like existence.

The absence of religion was a critical difference, and the text reveals that conversion was an important goal. Best writes, “The world is grown to a more fulnesse and perfection; many unknowen lands and ilands, (not so much as thought upon before) made knowen unto us; [and] Christs name spred” (20). Lurking here is the sense of how a human being is truly completed by the acceptance of the Christian religion; the “fulnesse and perfection” of which Best speaks is ultimately linked to the evangelical mission. It also speaks of a divinely ordained sense of duty to *know* the world. In 1625, Charles I declared the New World to be “our Royal Empire descended upon us” (qtd. in Pagden 15). Was it descended from heaven? Was there a divine mandate to govern? Best thought so: “God’s divine will and pleasure is, to have oure common wealth

increased with no lesse abundance of His hyden treasures and golde mynes than any other nation” (128).

Furthermore, the mission is not only English but inherently Christian. “In the highest parte of this hedlande, he caused his companye to make a columne or crosse of stone, in token of Christian possession. In this place there is plenty of blacke ore and divers preatie stones” (267), Best writes. Unflinchingly – and maybe spastically – Best moves from the religious conviction of the cross to the profit of the ore and stones. This gives ownership a kind of supernatural dimension that the English cannot claim by themselves. However, Best is pessimistic about whether the Inuit can be reclaimed: “to reforme those infidels *if it were possible* to Christianitie” (252, italics mine). Religion functions both as a tool by which the explorers insulate themselves and as a weapon against the savage. Only Christians could truly exhibit civility and be civilized, ergo the pagan societies Best encounters in present-day Newfoundland could not be a true community.

The eighth article of conduct laid out by Best reads:

If any man in y<sup>e</sup> fleete... hale his fellow, knowing him not, he shal give him this watchword, *Before the world was God*. The other shall aunswer him, if he be one of our fleete *After God, came Christe, his Sonne*. So that if anye be founde amongst us, not of oure owne company, he that firste descryeth [the intruder] shall give warning to the Admirall by himselfe. (230)

Here, the explorers are concerned with the possibility of being physically infiltrated, but this is compounded by a sense of cultural intrusion by New World peoples. In a predictable measure against such invasion, they use a defense – the verbal exchange –

that is enmeshed in the two worlds from which the Inuit are excluded: Christianity and English language.

Best records a revealing image as Frobisher and his men approach *Freeseland* (Greenland):

Marching towards our boats, we espied certaine of the countrie people on the top of *Mount Warwicke* with a flag, wafting us backe againe, and making great noise, with cries like the mowing of bulles, seeming greatly desirous of conference with us: wheruppon the General, being therewith better acquainted, answered them again with the like cries, whereat, and with the noise of our trumpets, they seemed greatly to rejoyce, skipping, laughing, and dancing for joy. (Best 129)

Best paints the encounter as a Christian dialogue. The Englishmen have arrived in the aptly named *Michael* and the *Gabriel* to spread the word of God and bring civility to a country barren physically and spiritually. The archangel Gabriel, whose most enduring symbol is his trumpet, is also embodied in the “noise of our trumpets.” After initial reluctance, the inhabitants rejoice with the arrival of salvation. Ellis suggests that the third voyage is a divine test that the crew must pass. In a style eerily similar what can be found in *Exodus* or *Psalms*, he writes, “Thus continued we all that dismall and lamentable night, plunged into this perplexitie, looking for instant death: but our God (who never leaveth them destitute which faithfully call upon him)... caused the windes to cease: and the fogge which all that night lay on the face of the water to cleare” (Ellis A.viii). In the offenses perpetrated by the masterless Inuit could be “included a new concept of collective crime: of a good society versus a wicked one; of Christians against a coven of witches” (13), according to A.L. Beier.

Like the Orcadians, the people of Freeseland are also credited a level of civility, but Best presents them with reservation. The climate is wild and even less surmountable.

Best reports,

This Freeseland sheweth a ragged and high lande, having the mountaynes almost covered with snow amongst the coast full of drift ise, and seemeth almost inaccessible.... It... appeareth by a description set out by two breethren, Nicholaus and Antonius Genoa, who being driven off from Ireland with a violent tempest, made shipwracke heere, and were the first knowen Christians that discovered this lande... and described the condition of the inhabitants, declaring them to be as civill and religious people as we.... we find it very agreeable. This coast séemeth to have good fishing. (125)

Despite the forbidding geography and the unrefined appearance of the people, the land and its inhabitants hold promise. Like the inhabitants of Orkney, they are apparently Christians (“religious people”). Lurking just beneath the surface is the notion of conversion. In a romantic aside that borrows the biblical symbols of shipwreck and tempest, Best describes two Italian brothers, Nicholaus and Antonius, as the “the first knowen Christians that discovered this lande.” Because their description survives (at least in oral form), we are left to surmise that they eventually returned to Europe after converting the natives of Freeseland. It appears to Best that such natives are malleable and may eventually be good candidates for incorporation into the civitas. Based on evidence of religion, trade, and technological advancement, the slow process of civilizing had already begun. There is a compatibility, he senses. The brothers Genoa serve as a model for Best and his companions – bear hardship, confront a treacherous land, convert its people, return home. In addition to these, Best would record the plundering of resources, such as the gold ore that Frobisher and his crew mine.

In addition, the explorers and the inhabitants of Orkney share a religion: “In this island hath bin sometime an abbey, or a religious house, called *Saint Magnus*” (123). While the identity of *Saint Magnus* is difficult to ascertain, “abbey,” “religious,” and “Saint” all point to a form of Christianity. Religion, which is associated with the metropolis, is therefore also linked to civility: “the doctrine of God is more fitly delivered, and the discipline thereof more aptly to be executed” in cities (Stowe 200).

In his 1611 dictionary, Randle Cotgrave defines *civilizer* as “to civilize, bring to civilitie, make civill, to tame, quiet, reclaime.” George Best would not have been alive to have read it, but it speaks to the heart of what he considered the mission of the voyages. The final four words – “to tame, quiet, reclaime” – are the most important. *Tame* means to control, to bring under influence. *Quiet* carries with it the sense that the subject must be humbled and subdued. Finally, *reclaime* infers the uncomfortable notion that the subject has stepped outside the bounds of nature and must be returned. It suggests possession and conversion, as well. The entire definition is a force acting upon an unwilling object (to “make civill”). Best, the *civilizer*, not only records the oppression and reclamation of the inhabitants and the land; he tames and quiets them through the mere act of writing. It is, of course, the image that is recorded in the history of the dominant culture that is likely to survive. “Inevitably, the voices of the colonizing, literate community have survived best” (1081), writes theorist Dennis Walder.

**“Our men gave them pinnes and pointes, and such trifles as they had....”**

While the state does not exist only for the purposes of commercial trade, trade is characteristic of the state (Aristotle 1280a34-40). Best records the inequitable trading relationship between the English explorers and the Inuit, which demonstrates Frobisher’s ability to economically overpower the native population. With what appears to be an ineffective trading mechanism, the Inuit demonstrate that they are without the state, according to Best. The labor relationship between the two groups was never meant to be fair, of course. The English exchange trivial objects, such as bells, for valuable commodities, such as gold. In addition, the explorers exchange civility and religion for labor and subjection. Ellis describes how parts of one culture are literally removed and another culture is left behind: “Oure Generall... gave commaundement, that the men shoulde take... a couple of white Dogges, for which he left pinnes, pointes, knives, and other trifling things” (A.vi).

Aristotle is slippery when it comes to commercial trade, “the art of exchange” (1257a15). On one hand, he recognizes bartering as natural but characteristic of primitive nations: “It arises at first from what is natural, from the circumstance that some have too little, others too much” (1257a16-7). Stowe has no such reservations, confidently reminding us that trade is also best practiced in cities (201). Hayklut recognized the importance of establishing trading relationships and that his voyages were primarily economic in nature, but the benefit was to be realized not by one person, but by the nation (Helgerson 166-8).

Trade, which Helgerson argues was vital to English identity during this period (185), connotes an element of inclusion, of participation. At the least, it implies a mutual recognition and partnership. The Orcadians whom Best encounters en route are willing traders who “brought us for oure money, such things as they had” (Best 123). While they may “have greate wante of leather, and desire our olde shoes, apparell, and old ropes (before money) for their victuals... they are not ignorant of the value of our coine” (Best 123). Here, Best depicts a people bizarre in their desires and mode of living but one that exhibits comforting similarities. The Inuit fail to establish a regular and effective trading partnership with the explorers. This contributes to Best’s perception of the savages as just that – an unorganized bunch of nomads incapable of advancing beyond a primitive community.

Indeed, *A true discourse* shows how truly incompatible the exchange was. “Our men gave them pinnes and pointes, and such trifles as they had. And they likewise bestowed on our men two bowe cases, and suche things as they had” (130), Best records. Despite the exotic nature of pins or mirrors for the Inuit, the labor exchange was uneven. What the English valued as everyday was exchanged for things the Inuit considered important:

The generall and his maister being met with their two companions together, after they hadde exchanged certaine thinges the one with the other, one of the salvages, for lacke of better marchandise, cutte off the tayle of his coate (whiche is a chiefe ornament among them) and gave it unto oure General for a present. (Best 130)

By “better,” Best means “more appropriate for the occasion,” perhaps because he sees little value in the coattail, but he recognizes the value placed on the object by the Inuit. Nonetheless, an object of deep cultural significance is exchanged for the inconsequential.

On more than one occasion, trinkets are exchanged for natives themselves, who become commodities in references like “*our people* of Meta Incognita” (Best 54, italics mine). After the Inuit man presents his coattail to Frobisher, the captain “presently upon a watchword given, with his maister sodainely laid holde upon the two salvages” (Best 131). The ruse is calculated and planned, as indicated by the use of a watchword. Best does not even bother to present it as a defensive move or a reaction. On the first expedition, “one of [the native men] came neare the ship side, to receive [a] bell, which, when he thought to take at the captaine’s hand, he was thereby taken himself; for the captain being redily provided, let the bel fal and cought the man fast, and plucked him with maine force[,] boate and al into his bark[,] out of the sea” (Best 74). This image, of a fisherman catching a fish, carries the unmistakable subtext of kidnapping as sport. It also demonstrates a ridiculous exchange; a bell holds the same value as the freedom of a human being. Further, it hints at the idea that this Inuit man is being brought *to* civilization (the ship) *from* a wild, dangerous, and untamed place (the sea) *by* a representative of civilization (Frobisher).

**“This strange Infidel, whose like was never seen, red, nor harde of before, and whose language was neyther knowne nor understoode of anye...”**

By distinguishing the natives as substantially different from the European crew, Best establishes the groundwork to preclude the Inuit from the civitas. Aristotle sets the precedent by identifying a group that was defined by its non-connection to civilization. “He who by nature... is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity” (1253a2-3), Aristotle warns. Best applies this definition of the other – they who naturally are without an organized community – to his narratives. The “bad man” of Aristotle becomes the subhuman Inuit of *A true discourse*. “Aristotle is usually read as treating certain foreigners as justly enslaved based on an immutable inferiority he is said to associate with those non-Greeks” (11), writes political scientist Jill Frank. Frank suggests an interesting course of reading when she argues that Aristotle considers foreigners to be inferior based on behavior, not birthright, but to do so would be to ignore Aristotle’s theory of natural slavery. However, an approach to foreigners and slaves that considers behavior implicitly opens the door to manumission.

Best has no real opportunity to observe progression in behavior, anyway. His encounters with the Inuit provide him a snapshot by which to judge them.

Seed argues that a clear boundary had to be maintained in how the two groups (colonizers and indigenous) were defined (116). This boundary would have been a contributing force in the conception of these natives as *other*. Best often uses comparison to judge cultural practices, and this method rarely results in a favorable portrayal of the

Inuit peoples, comparison being the easiest and most readily accessible means by which to make an assessment. For example, in one passage he records the behavior of a native woman as “not muche unlike oure dogges” (143). Best defines the native in opposition to the Englishman, and vice versa. What is unlike the English is not part of the English community. More importantly, it affirms the identity of the native as an outsider.

If the natives Best encounters do not reside within the community, they must exist outside it, a simple enough conclusion. But how are they depicted as outsiders? More than just without the walls of the civitas, they are incompatible with the way of life that exists within it. In *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, Tzvetan Todorov writes,

I can conceive of these others as an abstraction... as the Other – other in relation to myself, to *me*; or else as a specific social group to which *we* do not belong... beings whom [nothing] links to me on the cultural, moral, historical plane... outsiders whose language and customs I do not understand, so foreign that in extreme circumstances I am reluctant to admit that they belong to the same species as my own. (3)

If the *other* is outside, non-conformed, mysterious, undefined, and non-homogenous, it is precisely this type of person who confronts Frobisher and his crew. “This strange infidel, whose like was never seen, red, nor harde of before, and whose language was neyther knowne nor understoode of anye” (Best 74), he describes. Best functions as a witness here, his words reflecting a measure of disbelief in the face of stark difference, in terms not only of the natives but also of the place. The encounter itself creates this distinction of the native as exterior to the community, and he is now defined only by Best, Ellis, Eden, and other chorographers. Through the very act of writing, Best is celebrating the English language, which has thus far been incapable of expressing the

existence of his captives; he remarks that they are “more worth the beholding than can be well expressed in writing” (144).

In *The Politics*, we find an *other*, as well. “Which is the more desirable life, that of a citizen who is a member of a state, or that of an alien who has no political ties” (1324a15-7), Aristotle asks, answering “man, when perfected, is the best of animals, but, when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all... the most savage of animals” (1252a31-7). The Inuit are clearly without a legal or political structure, according to Best, and he leaves us with no shortage of animal comparisons. “They are in many ways, as [Aristotle] says more than once, like domestic animals” (110), notes Williams.

Without ties to the *civitas*, the outsider cannot by definition achieve the excellent life because that life is based on self-sufficiency. Stowe concurs, writing that “men are congregated into cities and commonwealths for honesty and utility’s sake” (200). Further, this isolation suggests that the outsider has no family, which is designed by nature to “supply men’s everyday wants” (Aristotle 1252a13). Without family, which Cicero calls “the foundation of civil government, the nursery, as it were, of the state” (*De Officiis* 1.54), the natives Best encounters “have not particular wives, neither do they range themselves into families, but consort together as beasts” (Richard Young, qtd. in Beier 51).

In many ways, Best simply refuses to recognize the humanity of the Inuit, who live on the border of humankind as “caniballes” (271) and “wilde beastes” (283). He engages in a concentrated campaign to distinguish the native population as outsiders to

the human community, mimicking Aristotle. Depicting them as less than human justifies their domination; furthermore, as Seed argues, if they are not human, they have no claim to the land they inhabit (115). Besides, Best objects to the idea that they are actually fixed *inhabitants* in the land anyway. Best writes, “They make their nests to sleepe in. They defile these most filthylie with their beastly sleeping... and live in hords and troupes, withoute anye certayne abode” (138). This is perhaps his most vicious description, and it is powerful. Not only are they inhuman beasts who live in nests instead of more permanent, European-style structures, they are “filthy” and congregate with one another in “hords,” which magnifies the distastefulness of their existence. They have no defined homes, no “certayne abode.” Sleeping is a benign and inconsequential activity, but the indigenous men and women manage to do it “filthylie.” Either Best is grasping at straws to make them look much worse than they are or he is truly and entirely repulsed by the natives.

Best depicts the native populace as without governance or structure and as brutish nomads. As such, they cannot exist within a *civitas*, at least by themselves: “A state exists for the sake of a good life, and not for the sake of life only; if life were the only object, slaves and brute animals might form a state, but they cannot, for they have no share in happiness or in a life based on choice” (Aristotle 1280a31-4). They are incapable of achieving the good life (happiness) and are therefore destined to be enslaved. Without reason (choice), they must rely on their masters to make choices for them. Inasmuch as the English Renaissance was the general enlightenment of society

through the arts, the natives remain acutely uncultured, according to Best, who characterizes them in terms of barbarians “with cries like the mowing of bulls” (129).

They are wild and unnatural and uncultivated: “They live in caves of the earth and hunte for their dinners or praye, even as the beare or other wilde beastes do” (Best 283). Lacking in human sensibility, these natives exist in the wild, in animal holes, and they must hunt for their meals in a day-to-day effort to survive, whereas the Englishman had a reliable agricultural system and raise livestock. Because the natives do not maintain an ordered system of food production, they are akin to the beast that must hunt for its food. As such, they are impulsive instead of rational, violent instead of methodical. The animal qualities replace sound reasoning with an instinctual, rapacious lust. Best also objects to the social groupings in which he finds the Inuit, as these reflect animal groupings. They live in *packs*, like wild dogs. Ironically, the pack structure that he finds threatening is found in the cohesive crew with which he is traveling.

In passages that detail encounters between the crew and the natives, Best recognizes attributes of family and village, but he also records qualities of animal behavior; the Inuit “hunte for their dinners or praye, even as the Beare, or other wilde beastes do” (283). If there is monogamous coupling, he does not mention it or does not know. The British, in fact, attempt to force this kind of relationship on the several Inuit they capture. Best writes,

Having now got a woman captive for the comferte of our man, we broughte them both together, and every man with silence desired to beholde the manner of their meeting and entertaynement... At theyr first encountering, they behelde each the other very wistly a good space.... and afterwards, being growen into more familiar

acquaintance by speech, were turned together, so that (I thinke) the one would hardly have lived, without the comfort of the other. (144)

This scene has a striking similarity to a modern description of a zoo. The couple is dependent on the environment provided by the explorers. They exist for the “entertainment” of the crew. The man, in captivity, must be nurtured and cared for (hence the woman) as though he were a caged animal, which in many ways, he is. The explorers prescribe the setting in which he is to thrive, namely a cabin aboard the ship in the company of a female, which is part of the process of civilizing both of them. This is a European arrangement profoundly distinct from the native settlements the explorers encounter on land:

Upon the maine land over against the Countesse’s Iland we discovered, and behelde to our great marvell, the poore caves and houses of those countrie people, which serve them (as it shoulde seeme) for their winter dwellings, and are made two fadome under grounde in compasse rounde, like to an oven, being joined fast one by another, having holes like to a fox or conny berrie, to keepe and come together. They under-trench these places with gutters, so that the water falling from the hilles above them, may slide away without their annoiance, and are seated commonly in the foote of a hil, to shielde them better from the colde winds, having their dore and entrance ever open towards the South. (Best 137-8)

Best is astonished that people could live this way, and he questions the humanity of the inhabitants. One detects a hint of admiration in his voice, but that could be easily confused with his sense of self-satisfaction in being able to chronicle these descriptions. After all, Best fancies himself a scientist. However, the habitat that Frobisher constructs for the captured couple only partially produces what the crew expects:

And, for so muche as we coulde perceive, albeit they lived continually together, yet did they never use as man and wife, though the woman spared not to do all necessarie things that apperteyned to a good huswife indifferently for them both, as in making cleane their Cabin, and every other thing that apperteyned to his ease: for

when hee was seasicke, shee would make him cleane, she would kill and flea y<sup>e</sup> dogges for their eating and dresse his meate. Only I thinke it worth the noting the continencie of them both, for the man would never shift [change clothes by] himselfe, except he had firste caused the woman to depart out of his cabin. (Best 144-5)

This image further validates the English sense of community and identifies the the Inuit as transgressors of the family concept. The man and woman, who do not accept the roles of husband and wife, violate the most basic form of society identified by Aristotle, that of the family. Being in the company of the *ambassadors of civilization*, however, seems to pay off. “They beganne to growe more civill, familiar, pleasant, and docible amongst us in a verye shorte time” (284), Best writes. No doubt, however, that he believes it to be *civilization through association* with those who are already *civilized*.

Even the land is void of production and possibility: “Their earth yeeldeth no graine or fruite of sustenance for man, or almost for beast to live upon: and the people will eate grasse and shrubs of the grounde” (Best 286). As Marx would later write, people “begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence” (653). Hence, Best treats those he encounters according to Aristotle’s conception of slaves, like animals; in this case, however, they are animals that have yet to be domesticated, which is highly visible in the passages that deal with natives the crew has managed to capture. In the “zoo” passage mentioned above, not only are the man and woman, like animals, put under observation by a fascinated crew (“every man with silence desired to beholde”), their human qualities are removed (“with greate change of coloure and countenance... their captivitie had taken away the use of their tongs and

utterance”). Their appearances change and they cannot communicate, even with each other.

Best peppers the text with instances of failed communication – between natives and other natives, crew members and natives, and crew members with other crew members. For example, when one of Frobisher’s men mistakes a woman for a man in battle (another scene in which identity is fluid), he fires an arrow that misses her but injures her child. Best writes, “our surgeon, meaning to heale hir child’s arme, applyed salves therunto. But, she not acquainted with such kinde of surgerie, plucked these salves away, and by continuall licking with hir owne tongue, not mucche unlike oure dogges, healed uppe the child’s arme” (Best 143). As though the child were an inconsequential dog itself, we are not told if he or she survives. Eden, too, saturates his text with animal similes: a captured native resorts to “gratinge his teethe as it had bin a lyon” (Arber 81), for example.

It is not all about animals, however. Best casts them as a weak and frightened group by making them “deperate,” and “sullen of nature,” suggesting that they are not only violent but socially incompatible with – or are unwilling to engage – the Europeans. He describes two native women captured after battle: “the rest by flight escaped among the rockes, saving two women, whereof the one being old and ougly, our men thought she had bin a divell or some witch (Best 142-3). The old woman embodies a supernatural threat, distinctly because of her appearance as old and haggard, but it is no doubt

amplified by her status as *other*. “These people are great inchaunters, and use manye charmes of witchcraft” (Best 286-7), he adds.

Best pushes the natives even closer to the very boundary of humanity by alleging cannibalism. Peter Hulme notes that at its inception, the term *cannibal* described a people from a particular island. Before long, it was indicative of a practice (*cannibalism*), and it finally came to describe a terrifying group type of people (Hulme 15), a group that was seemingly not confined to a geographic area. Not surprisingly, the cannibals were recorded as potentially wealthy (Hulme 54), but they were also uncivilized and hostile. Lamenting the fate of five Englishmen captured by the natives, Best writes, “And considering also their ravenesse and bloody disposition in eating anye kinde of rawe fleshe or carrion, howsoever stinking, it is to be thoughte that they had slaine and devoured oure men” (143). Best again compares the natives to cannibals:

they perceyved people whiche wafted unto them, as it seemed, with a flagge or auntient. And bycause the caniballes and countrie people had used to doe the like, when they perceived any of our boats to passe by, they suspected them to be the same.... [Frobisher], wyth his companies, resolved to recover the same auntient, if it were so, from those base, cruell, and man-eating people, or else to lose their lives. (269)

These people on shore are in possession of an English flag of some type, which Best no doubt believed they had removed land already claimed by the explorers. Here, Best alludes to the ambiguous and unstable nature of the New World, which threatens to dilute the English sense of identity. A native can be a cannibal, and a cannibal can be a native disguised as a European. A European can seem strangely savage, as it turns out: “In the ende, they discerned them to be their countreyemen, and then they deemed them to have loste theyr shyppes” (Best 269). This ambiguous identity seems to run counter to Best’s

desire to organize, distinguish, and classify. In another passage, this appropriation is more real. The explorers

beheld (to their greatest marvaile) a dublet of canvas, made after the Englishe fashion, a shirt, a girdle, three shoes for contrarie feete and of unequal bignesse, which they well conjectured to be the apparell of our five poore councitriemen whiche were intercepted the laste yeare by these countrie people, aboute fiftie leagues from this place. (Best 140-41)

This discovery is made in a native tent, and it exposes an underlying fear of being consumed by the New World.

Far from the paradise Best often associated with the New World, Best is met with a much harsher reality. While tales of Caribbean fertility pour into Europe, Frobisher and his men find an unexpectedly cold and hostile climate, “a place verie hardly and uneasily to be inhabited for the greate cold” (Best 61). The voyage itself is remarkably difficult: “stormes of seas by long and tedious voyages, danger of darke fogs and hidden rockes in unknown coastes, congealed and frozen seas, with mountains of fleeting ise, nor yet present dayly before their face” (Best 19). The peoples they meet in Newfoundland are unfamiliar compared to even the Orcadians or the Freeselanders, both of whom bear some semblance of government, culture, and technology. Instead, he encounters “A barbarous and uncivill people, Infidels and miscreantes” (Ellis B.vi). Although Best is never blunt about it, the explorers may have exaggerated the importance of the (worthless) ore they mined in the face of such an alien and desolate environment, a land that would not yield the return of either a Northwest Passage or substantive resources. This, in turn, may have led Best and Ellis to place additional emphasis on their encounters with natives.

Ellis unknowingly provides a metaphor that we can apply to his early experiences in the New World. He includes in his introductory pages several drawings of a massive iceberg the crew encountered en route during the third voyage. Text accompanying the first drawing reads, “At the... light of this great and monstrous peece of yce, it appeared in this shape.” The drawing depicts an enormous two-pillared mountain of ice. However, in the second drawing, the iceberg has turned 180 degrees, revealing a hollow center: “In approaching right against it, it opened in shape like unto this, shewing hollow within.” He continues, “In comming neere unto it, it shewed after this shape,” and another drawing shows the floating ice mountain from yet another angle. Like the Inuit and the New World, its shape changes constantly into both terrifying and relieving images. Its alien nature captures the imagination of the crew. It is menacing and threatens to consume them. Its appearance is deceptive. As Best writes, “All is not gold that shineth” (133). (The irony of the worthless ore is apparently lost here.)

In some ways, the New World, as it is depicted in *A true discourse*, has a remarkable ability to alienate those who set out to explore it. The observation of strange new phenomena helps to explain the ambivalent reaction to America, a land that is fascinating but threatening, rich but barren, and the disorientation experienced by the explorers. *A true discourse* defies stability, particularly in the disorientation that Best experiences. In one especially bizarre passage, Best writes, “He saw mightie deere y<sup>t</sup> seemed to be mankind, which ranne at him, and hardly he escaped with his life in a narrow way, where he was faine to use defence and policie to save his life” (73). A

mighty deer that seemed to *be* mankind? Schizophrenic images like this occur frequently in the early encounters and include a blur of movement and an aura of danger.

In a way, exposure to the Americas and the fascination and hardships that came with it alter the Englishmen; the New World molds the explorers as much as the explorers were hoping to affect the New World. Best seems aware of this transformation, warning, “I would not wishe Englishmen to be newe unlike themselves” (Best 14)<sup>7</sup>. They have been altered by the journey and are unlike the men who left England. Describing a group of Spanish conquistadors who have strayed off course and landed in the court of a local king, Eden records the native voice in a man who notes how cruel and destructive the Spaniards have become in their quest for gold. In one passage, Eden describes the conquistadors as a mutinous, “wanderynge kynde of men (owr men I meane)... lyving like banished men” (Arber 116-17). He feels the need to interject “owre men I mean” to explain that he is writing of the Spaniards, lest we get the wandering, masterless men confused with the natives they that have met. In addition, the indigenous peoples are a measure against which the explorers can affirm their own identities. If the identity of the native people can fluctuate between savage cannibal and “civill and religious,” the identity of the explorer cannot be fixed, either. The establishment of commercial

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<sup>7</sup> I have used the digitized first edition for this quote. Collinson corrects this to “nowe” in his edition, and it makes much sense that way. However, an admittedly blurry image of the original manuscript page reads “newe,” and while the sentence is less pleasing grammatically, it carries a deeper meaning. Punctuation is not Best’s strength, so the lack of a comma between “newe” and “unlike” can be dismissed. Collinson made a variety of editorial judgments on spelling and punctuation, most of them sensible, but he may have erred here.

exchange, not to mention mere exposure, produces an unavoidable type of cultural exchange and dual influence.

Best's narrative reveals a pattern of decentralization and disorientation, which is caused as much by tangible phenomena, such as fog, as it is by the accumulating sense that the world is a much larger place than previously thought. "Men have discovered the totality of which they are a part, whereas hitherto they formed a part without a whole" (5), writes Todorov. This must have had a very discombobulating effect, which might contribute to the shifting image of "the supposed continent of *America*" (Best 134) as both opportunity and threat.

Ellis describes the Inuit as both virtuous and savage at the same time. Once ashore, they "mette with the people of the contrie, which seemed very humane and civil, and offered to trafficke with our men" (B.ii). Several pages later in his manuscript, he is far less kind: "A barbarous and uncivill people, Infidels and miscreantes" (B.vi). Were these different natives? Was there an unpleasant confrontation? He does not say. It may be selective recollection, and Best and Ellis may be leaving out incriminating details. It may be symptomatic of the debate between Bartoleme Las Casas and Sepulveda, with the authors recognizing both the human and inhuman qualities in the natives they encountered. It is also a means of harsh reduction; they initially establish the natives as human only to pick them apart, which in turn suggests that they had squandered the benefits of civility and humanity. The ambiguous nature of the New World is present throughout *A true discourse*; it is a place that holds the potential to be at once "the

earthly Paradise, and the only place of perfection in this world” (Best 46-7) and a place of “continuall paines” (15). Stephen Greenblatt posits that wonder and fascination are the defining experiences of discovery (14), but it causes the destruction of understanding (19). Of course, the dark shape of the masterless savage was in part defined by the public thirst. In the early seventeenth century, “writers freely plagiarized and invented to satisfy the demand” (Beier 8) for literature that depicted nomads and vagabonds in the domestic realm. Ellis admits that he is “prone and willing to satisfye and answeare your desire... the nature of man is always desirous of newes” (A.iii).

While Best busily describes the “countrie people” as aliens, Frobisher’s men also become the frightening *other* to the natives. At the climax of a battle, “when they [the natives] founde they were mortally wounded, being ignorant what mercy meaneth, with deadly furie they cast themselves headlong from off the rocks into the sea, least perhaps their enemies shoulde receive glorie or praye of their dead carcasses, for they supposed us be like to be canibales, or eaters of mans flesh” (Best 142). Not merely enemies, the explorers become predatory hunters and cannibals. “The identities of the colonizers are called into question as much as those of the colonized” (122), writes Hadfield. With no indigenous voice to lay claim to these ideas, we quickly realize that Best is making assumptions, that he is actually projecting his own fears about the Inuit into his narrative.

The act of voyage is marked by duality. It was indeed full of dangers:

How dangerous it is to attempt new discoveries, either for the length of the voyage or the ignorance of the language, the want of interpretors, newe and unaccustomed elementes and ayres, straunge and unsavory meats, daunger of theeves and robbers, fiercenesse of wilde beasts and fishes, hugenesse of wooddes, daungerousnesse of seas, dreade of

tempestes, feare of hidden rockes, steepe nesse of mountaines, darknesse of sodaine falling fogges, continuall paines taking withoute anye reste, and infinite others. (15)

But it was also rewarding:

How pleasaunt and profitable it is, to attempt newe discoveries, either for the sundry sights and shapes of strange beastes and fishes, the wonderful workes of nature, the different manners and fashions of diverse nations, the sundy sortes of governement, the sight of straunge trees, fruite, foules, and beastes, the infinite treasure of pearle, gold and silver, the newes of new found landes, the sundrie positions of the sphere, and many others. (16)

These two passages, spaced so closely together, reflect the simple reality of sixteenth century voyages to the New World in that they were perilous but also filled with the possibility of reward. On one hand, the natives are potential “theeves and robbers” and inhuman savages, but on the other, they are self-governing and have “manners and fashions” to be admired. Because of extreme difference, the natives defy understanding, which is the purpose of the travel narrative – to achieve new understandings and other truths, to know the world. Likewise, the land is treacherous and unwelcoming, full of dangerous animals, confusing and unforgiving terrain, and pain and injury. However, it is perhaps precisely these things that captivate them, since they are so different and unknown. For example, the “steepe nesse of mountaines” becomes one of the “the wonderful workes of nature.”

**“By no means we can apprehend any of them, althoughe we attempted often in the laste voyage...”**

Aristotle provides Best with a justification for conquest, which in turn enables Best to assert control over the new civilization and how that civilization is defined; it is

important for Best to rationalize this kind of control, and he finds precedent in Greek philosophy. Aristotle argues that conquest is acceptable if a) it is a means by which to achieve the good life for the extant citizens, b) does not constitute a “general despotism” (1334a1), and c) enslaves only those who deserve to be enslaved. While Aristotle warns against a city too large to be governed effectively, he endorses conquest to enlarge territory inasmuch as it will increase the self-sufficiency of the state (1326b23-31). This argument allows Best to preclude the Inuit from the civitas by enslaving them. Two obvious motivations behind the voyages, economic expansion and security from invasion by other countries, are in keeping with Aristotelian principles.

Evidence suggests that the explorers never meant to cultivate a people into civilization and that the purpose was primarily economic in nature. Hayklut, for example, felt “what mattered most to England was finding buyers for its cloth and suppliers for its needs” (Helgerson 171). At the conclusion of the second voyage, Best agrees, writing that no “man shoulde put himselfe in hazarde ashore, considering the matter he now entended was for the ore and not for the conquest” (151).

In other words, the motive was to plunder and depart, instead of leaving a permanent English settlement in the New World. The good life meant the eventual cessation of labor, a life of leisure. It was an end-state that could only be reached through continuous advances. Aristotle offers two means by which to achieve it: acquisition and slavery. He places no limits on the territorial extent of a state, arguing only that its proper size is that which “can produce everything necessary” and “enable the inhabitants

to live at once temperately and liberally in the enjoyment of leisure” (1326b28-32). The scope of Aristotle’s definition here is quite wide. It would permit domination and colonization, if they were necessary to achieve or sustain the good life. The Northwest Passage would have resulted in increased commerce, which could have allowed England to compete with Spain; taking possession of North America would have enabled the English to leverage existing New World resources, such as gold ore. Again, Best would find justification ancient philosophy:

Of the art of acquisition then there is one kind which by nature is a part of the management of the household, in so far as the art of household management must either find ready to hand, or itself provide, such things necessary to life, and useful for the community of the family or state. (Aristotle 1256b27-31)

The master of the house must acquire certain implements to run the household efficiently; the colonizer need secure what is required for a high standard of living in the empire. Conquest over distance was characteristic of the Roman Empire, and it was the duty of the conqueror to be attentive to the needs of his people, even the uncivilized, argues Cicero:

Love those whom the Senate and People of Rome have committed to you charge and authority, protect them in every way, desire their fullest happiness. If the luck of the draw had sent you to govern savage, barbarous tribes in Africa or Spain or Gaul, you would still be as a civilized man be bound to think of their interests and devote yourself to their needs and welfare. (*Letters* 1.27)

Although Best depicts the first voyage as exploratory, the second and third voyages emphasize acquisition and exploitation, hinting at settlement. Passage to Cathay would provide a substantial economic boon to England, Best realizes, but the mere acquisition of any territory was becoming an important objective as Spain and Portugal asserted more control further south. Recognizing a single impetus behind the voyages

proves to be difficult; Best presents us with multiple motivations, and the text reflects a changing emphasis. By the third voyage, the search for a passage to Cathay sounds like a pretense:

it was thought needful, both for the better guard of those parts already found, for further discovery of the inland and secreats of those countries, and also for further search of y<sup>e</sup> passage to Cataya (wherof the hope continually more and more encrease<sup>t</sup>) that certain numbers of chosen soldiers and discrete men for those purposes should be assigned to inhabite there. (Best 226)

The very fact that Best mentions protection is a signal of a more permanent design, be it the establishment of a stable and permanent trading route, the continued extraction of resources, or colonization. He records that resources are devoted instead to inland exploration and mining. Both the size (150 men) and composition of the company designated to stay the winter in Newfoundland attest to more lasting plans for the New World. The community will consist of:

40 shoulde be marriners, for the use of ships, 30 miners for gatheringe the golde ore together for the nexte yeare, and 80 souldiers for the better garde of the reste, within which last number are included the gentlemen, goldfiners, bakers, carpenters and all necessarye persons. (Best 227)

The group mirrors the composition of the commonwealth, united under the state and its monarch. The crew includes gentlemen for government, soldiers for defense, miners for economy, navigators for transportation, and all the other “necessary persons” for a community, reflecting Aristotle’s requirement for diversity in the civitas. This England is metaphorically aboard each voyage to the New World. Its success is a validation of the civitas that exists in England, and the voyage is a collective and cooperative effort and an expression of the English community. Thus, Best represents the voyage as a public

enterprise for the enrichment of the country. Best advocates the continuity and dispersal of the English civitas:

this face of the earth whiche Almightye God hath given man as most convenient place to inhabite in, thorowe the negligence of man hathe, until of late dayes, layne so hidde and unknowen that he hathe loste the fruition and benefit of more than halfe the earth (30-31).

This passage makes clear the duty, divinely mandated, to discover unknown lands and to *use* the world.

Common sense would tell us that if the intent were economic, physical occupation would increase control, which would lead to a more substantial extraction of resources. Conquest is apparent, despite Best's claims to the contrary. The English competition with the Spanish and Portuguese necessitated this, and Sir Walter Raleigh would attempt the first permanent English settlement in the New World less than a decade after Frobisher's first voyage.

Best is elusive about Frobisher's motivations, which range from science to trading, ore to occupation. Walder argues that "the mixture of motives... were impossible to disentangle" (1079). The text becomes a promotional tool and a defense of the mission, not a mere record. Best repeatedly mentions the acquisition of the ore – not gold, exactly – as the return on investment. Multiple sources testify to its value, which in itself makes it suspect. Its collection "would at ye least countervaile in all respects, the adventurers charge, and give further hope and likelihood of greter matters to follow" (Best 226). In other words, it would be an adequate substitute for the "the adventurers charge" of discovering a route to Cathay. Why would Best present a substitute unless there was a strong possibility of failure? Why deviate from the established mission

unless the primary objectives could not be achieved? Phrases such as the “possibilitie and likelihoode of y<sup>e</sup> passage” (Best 226) on the third voyage rings hollow. The final words, “of greter matters to follow,” hint at the devastation to come. That he means conquest is unmistakable, given that:

there was a strong forte or house of timber, artificially framed, and cunningly devised by a notable learned man here at home, in ships to be carryed thither, wherby those men that were appointed there to winter and make their abode ye whole yeare. (Best 226)

The genesis of colonization is evident in the transportation of building materials to Newfoundland on the third voyage. This passage discusses the literal transplantation of the Old World into the New. On this voyage, it will not be enough to survey and explore, to view from afar aboard the safe confines of the ships. Instead, the men were “to have made their dwelling” (Ellis B.vi) had the ship *Dionysus*, which was carrying the building supplies, not sunk. As a fixed and permanent structure, the house, which was fabricated in England, represents the Old World. At a very real level, it insulates the English explorers from the land and its natives. Its intended construction reflects the barrier between a sedentary European culture and the nomadic culture of the Inuit. (Frobisher eventually abandoned the effort when it became apparent that constructing it out of local materials would take too long. Even still, Best records contingency plans “to erect up a lesse house for sixtie men” (259).) To make matters worse for Frobisher, the *Thomas of Ipswich*, “which had moste of their provision in her” (Ellis B.vii), was separated from the rest of the ships by a tempest.

With the timber structure lost, the crew attempts to construct an image of England for “the better to allure those brutish and uncivill people to courtesie” (Best 272). They not only construct a stone cross but also “a house whiche Captaine Fenton caused to be made of lyme and stone upon the Countesse of Warwickes Ilande, to the ende we mighte prove againste the nexte yere, whether the snowe coulde overwhelme it, the frosts breake uppe, or the people dismember the same” (Best 272). The limestone house is a test of the civitas in the New World. It is a lure to civilization. It is as much to measure the elements as it is to better detect the temperament of the people, who, Best realizes, may choose a life of savagery and dismantle the house. They might instead be drawn to its civilized amenities: “Also in the house was made an oven, and breade left baked therein, for them to see and taste” (Best 272). He continues, “We buryed the timber of our pretended forte, with manye barreles of meale, pease, griste, and sundrie other good things, which was of the provision of those whych should inhabite, if occasion served” (272).

The explorers respond to the Inuit by becoming more insular and protective:

On Thursday, the ninth of August, we beganne to make a small fort for our defence in the Countesse Hand, and entrenched a corner of a cliffe, which on thre parts like a wall of good heygth was compassed and well fenced with the sea, and we finished the rest with caskes of earth to good purpose, and this was called Bestes Bulwarke. (Best 148)

Best does not offer a satisfying explanation for the competing motivators of economy and conquest, religious conversion and civilization, but it helps to see them not as in opposition to each other but as complementary. His emphasis shifts from trade (discovering the Northwest Passage) to exploitation (mining the ore) to conquest

(discovering and seizing new lands) to enslavement (capturing the Inuit) to what Walder calls the “civilizing mission” (1083). An element of each of these exists in *A true discourse*, which also hints at revenge (recovering lost compatriots) and a yearning to make sense of strange new things.

In an admirably scientific way, Best even attempts to establish patterns and explain phenomena, such as weather and native activity, and he makes a concerted effort to understand the world around him. He writes at length on the possible factors that determine skin color, for example, and devotes pages to explaining geographical features, cultural habits, proper preparation for an oceanic voyage, and navigation. He expounds on indigenous wildlife: “All the fowles are farre thicker clothed with downe and feathers, and have thicker skinnes than any in England have: for, as that country is colder, so Nature hath provided a remedie thereunto” (287). Best applies his science, however fallibly, to native cultural practices. He searches for patterns and for explanations, trying to understand what is unknown, to make what is foreign familiar, to classify what is found. It cannot be said that this was the driving force behind the voyages, but the primal urge to explore and understand cannot be underestimated.

Slavery would also exclude the Inuit from the state. Slaves were a vital and presupposed element of the ancient world, asserts Williams (111-2). Cicero argues for the eventual release of the slave into the *civitas* once he or she had been effectively civilized (Williams 108). The idea of a mobile city inclusive of slaves comes to fruition when the crew captures several Inuit and transports them back to England; of course, the

transatlantic slave trade was an even more disastrous manifestation of this concept. Aristotle also argues that such individuals may be subjugated – if they are naturally inferior, that is – to provide these benefits to the larger community. In that sense, it was in Best’s interests to exclude the indigenous groups from the civitas. Resources were shared within a collective, but outsiders were not entitled to these resources.

However, Aristotle runs into problems with this curious contradiction: “Neither is a city to be deemed happy or a legislator to be praised because he trains his citizens to conquer and obtain dominion over their neighbours, for there is great harm in this” (1333b29-32). If Best subscribes to this principle, he cannot possibly justify the colonization of the New World, but the philosopher lets him off the hook: men “should obtain empire for the good of the governed... and seek to be masters only over those who deserve to be slaves” (1333b42-1334a2). Hence, as an agent of the English state, it is in Best’s interests to depict them as deserving of slavery. However, it compels him to depict the natives as inhuman or natural slaves, and perhaps he feels forced to exaggerate. Best drifts between emphasizing the civil qualities of the natives and depicting them as uncivilized, brutish beasts. In addition, there is a distinct interdependence between the explorer and the indigenous subject. “If the slave perish, the rule of the master perishes with him” (1278b36-7), warns Aristotle. Without the slave, the perfect life may be unrealized, in other words. The interdependency of the master/slave relationship either eludes, or is ignored by, Best.

The acquisition of natives by force (that is, slavery in broader sense) complements the seizure of territory as a means of realizing self-sufficiency. According to Aristotle, slavery was a natural phenomenon. Slaves were the natural and necessary enablers of leisurely activity. Simply put, “a slave is useful for the wants of life” (Aristotle 1260a34). They were part of the state, were simply less excellent than others, and were naturally destined to serve.

Best sees the acquisition of people as commonplace and assumed. For example, Best records a ruse Frobisher concocts to “retaine [a native] for an interpreter” (130). Any hope that *retaine* means a mutual exchange or compensation is quickly dashed when Frobisher’s companion “sodainely laid holde upon the two salvages” (Best 131), one of whom he was hoping to capture for that purpose.

**“So long as the ships were in sight, the people would not be scene...”**

Control of citizens, especially the control of their movement, was an important element within the structure of the civitas. Best repeatedly expresses frustration over his inability to corral the movement of the Inuit, and their resistance to control effectively expels them from civilization. Instead, the only way he can exercise some level of control is through his writing.

*The Politics* addresses the issue of control over subjects. As part of “household management,” the activities of the slave must be tightly managed. “The treatment and management of slaves is a troublesome affair; for, if they are not kept in hand, they are

insolent” (Aristotle 1269b8-9) and rebellious. Insurrections occur when the “citizens of the state have not found out the secret of managing their subject populations” (Aristotle 1269a12-13).

Frobisher attempts to find countermeasures to the physical movement of the natives, such as gifts and outright capture, whereas Best controls them textually through images and descriptions. Simply put, Best is literate and the natives are not; he is able to record a fundamentally biased perception that he also has the technological means to preserve and reproduce. Hence, it is his images that will be transmitted back to the continent, his descriptions that will survive. In a very real way, Best has already brought a type of order and logic through his writing. Best records no specific dialogue between the groups, even in third person. His remarks “whyche beeyng understoode” and “as wee understoode” (123) suggest that translation efforts have faltered. Finally, in some places, *A true discourse* reads as though it were an instruction manual, complete with summaries of what the reader will glean from the material, including “how a discoverer of new countries, is to proceede in his first attempt of any discoverie” and “howe to proceede and deale with straunge people, be they never so barbarous, cruell and fierce” (Best 15). The voyages are clearly meant to be replicated.

Manifest in *A true discourse* is the notion of movement, which affords both opportunity and protection while creating a sense of confusion and elusiveness. The indigenous Orcadians, for example, are uncontrolled: “Heere oure company goyng on lande, the inhabitants of these ilandes beganne to flee” (Best 123). The apprehension

Best shows throughout the text would have been compounded by what Paul Cefalu calls domestic “English anxieties over unauthorized movement” (86-7). Most of the encounters that Best records are mutually restricted in terms of movement and proximity to one another, and recalcitrance exacerbates the distrust between the two groups: “They earnestly desired our men to go uppe into their countrie, and our men offered them like kindnesse aboarde our shippes, but neyther parte (as it seemed) admitted or trusted the others curtesie” (130), Best writes. The explorers are protected within their ships, which instill fear in the Inuit peoples and provide an easy means of retreat for the English. “So long as the ships were in sight, the people would not be seene,” writes Ellis (B.v). The explorers had a “mobile technology of power” (9), argues Greenblatt, including writing, navigation, and muskets. These ships make them portable in ways the natives cannot be, but in some ways, the ships confine Best in that the natives possess a land-based power of movement. The Inuit use stealth to out-manuever Frobisher and his crew: “Before he could descende downe from the hylle certain of those people had almost cut off his boate from him, having stollen secretly behinde the rocks for that purpose” (Best 73). The natives are elusive, which counters the explorers’ wish to assert control. Ellis adds, “they tooke themselves to flight: whom our men pursued, but being not used to suche craggie cliffes, they soone lost the sight of them” (B.iv).

The natives are elusive and unrestricted, like the much-vilified masterless man in England. They resist the desires of the explorers: to know the land, to discover its gold, to classify, and most importantly, to contain. Movement in both texts represents the

ability to escape from control. There was a “pervasive fear of unauthorized travel and movement that English culture expresses” (Cefalu 91).

In describing the natives of one Caribbean island, Eden writes, “They are sumtymes seene. But owre men have yet layde handes on none of them. If at any tyme they coome to the light of men, and perceyve any makyng toward them, they flye swifter then a harte” (Arber 134). The defy definition, control, and human interaction. They exist in the shadows, outside of enlightened and civilized society (“the light of men”). They run away as though they were hunted deer. They are meant to be captured (“layde handes”). Here, movement is intimately linked to control.

In the end, though, *A true discourse* reinforces hierarchy instead of exposing its limits. Although the community of the voyage must at times improvise, it is highly regulated and structured, like the English civitas. Best writes of Frobisher

commandyng a trumpet to sounde a call for every man to repayre to the auncient, he declared to the whole company, how much the cause imported, for the service of hir majestie, our cuntry, our credites, and the safetie of our own lives, and therefore required every man to be conformable to order and to be directed by those he shoulde assigne. (134)

Best faithfully records more than a dozen laws and regulations established by Frobisher for the conduct of the voyages. The “articles and orders to be observed for the fleete, set downe by Captayne Frobisher, Generall, and delivered in writing to every Captayne” (Best 228). The laws themselves reveal the level at which structure is engrained into the transatlantic journeys – without which the state cannot be preserved (Aristotle 1303b8-9). Best records Elizabeth’s motivational address to the explorers before the third voyage; it stresses the importance of order and hierarchy. “Especiallye she prayd and rejoiced,

that among them there was so good order of government, so good agreement, every man so ready in his calling, to do whatsoever the Generall should commaunde” (225), he writes. Here, an almost utopian vision of the *civitas* seeps through. There is order, brotherhood and cooperation, diversity, dedication, and adherence to authority.

In contrast to his general depiction of natives as lawless and self-interested, the men on Frobisher’s expeditions were able to maintain the civilized master/servant relationship in trying circumstances, according to Best, at least: “For this may truly be spoken of these men, that there hath not bin scene in any nation, being so many in number, and so far from home, more civill order, better government, or agreement” (21). This quote, which is from the introduction to the narrative, suggests that the English explorers are well suited to bring civilization, which necessarily entailed bringing order and regimented structure, to the New World. The manifestation of this order in England was quite pronounced during the Renaissance: “Stoope Englande stoope, and learne to know thy lorde and master, as horses and other brute beastes are taught to doo.... For shame let us not be woorse then oxen and asses... How longe wylt thou nurysse in thy boosome that serpente whose nature is to devoure her moother?” (Arber 52-3).

This passage emphasizes obedience, order, and subjection. Like Best, Eden places the non-citizen (in this case, the person who will not submit to the authority of the community) in the company of wild animals. In the final line, he declares the vagabond to be a social poison and a threat to the natural order, the deceitful child that destroys its nurturing mother, or in this case, the outcasts who threaten to unravel the social fabric of

England. The question is a rhetorical flourish that appeals for the expulsion of such an element. The metropolis functions as a natural barrier to barbarism and instills order: people “are contented to give and take right, to and from their equals and inferiors, and to hear and obey their heads and superiors” (Stowe 200) in the metropolis.

In addition, Best takes special note that there is cohesion among different social groups in Frobisher’s company: “although the gentlemen, souldiers, and marriners (whiche seldome can agree) were by companies matched together” (21). Throughout the text, Best promotes order, control, and homogeneity.

**“It wyll make our countrie both rich and happye, and of these prosperous beginnings will growe hereafter (I hope) moste happye endings...”**

Aristotle argues, “For that some should rule and others be ruled is not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule” (1254a20-24). Slavery even “preserved” (Aristotle 1254b12) the slave, who was not self-sufficient, which is precisely how Best depicts the Inuit. In other words, it was in the slave’s best interests to be subjugated. The civitas, which could “transform all those who entered it” was to be spread to individuals (Pagden 22-3), not just foreign territories. The foeigner would be gradually cultivated as a new member of the English community.

The glue that holds the explorers (and the English civitas) together is the constitution of the state, which is a “partnership of citizens” (Aristotle 1276b1-2) diverse

but alike in the sense that they all work in agreement toward the good life. He adds, “it is evident that the sameness of the state consists chiefly in the sameness of the constitution” (1276b10-11) of the individuals. This collective attitude unifies the civitas and opens the door to new citizens, “whether the inhabitants are the same or entirely different” (Aristotle 1276a12-3). Hence, it is entirely possible for the native populace to (eventually) be incorporated into the civitas, a process the Orcadians and Freeselanders have already begun to greater and lesser extents, respectively. “The citizen should be moulded to suit the form of government under which he lives” (1337a12-3), Aristotle intones, a philosophy on which Best has rested his hopes of New World control.

Pagden notes that “the civitas had the power to transform all those who entered it” (23), which is critical to understanding the way Best approaches the indigenous populations – as subjects for the iterative process of *civilizing*. Stowe understands the civilizing process as evolutionary, as well. He writes, “inhabitants be better managed in order, and better instructed in wisdom” (201). Eden recognizes it: “It shall not be much from my purpose to declare howe of unknowen they become knowen, and of salvage and wilde, better manured” (Arber 65). This short sentence courses through the heart of what these travels produced. The world has become known and controlled; the indigenous have been fertilized as though they were barren soil, tamed as though they were wild animals, and in all ways improved. They are to be manured, cultivated, bettered, and eventually integrated with civilized society. Key, however, is that the form of civilization that exists in the New World is a stage; it is the projection of the civilized (ancient Greek

and Renaissance English) onto the savage (new and Inuit) that will begin to resolve barbarity. Aristotle explains that the state is preceded by the village, which is a collection of the first phase, the family. We have already seen this progression in the opening passage (“Man is borne not only to serve his owne turne (as *Tullie* sayeth) but hys kinsfolke, friends, and the common wealth especially”). It is ordered in evolutionary terms and mirrors the development of the state. First is the man who serves himself. Second is the man who labors for his family. Third is he that labors for the village (“friends”). Finally, the man contributes toward the overall self-sufficiency of the community (“the common wealth”), which Best identifies as the most important (“especially”).

Furthermore, it is in the interests of Best to civilize the indigenous peoples; “rule is the better which is exercised over better subjects – for example, to rule over men is better than to rule over wild beasts; for the work is better which is executed by better workmen” (Aristotle 1254a25-7). A civilized people will work toward the good of the state; a wild people will revolt.

Did Best expect something similar to that which he found in the Orkney islands and in Greenland – a pliable, willing people – in the Inuit? On most fronts, Best is met with disappointment. However, the Inuit occasionally imitate the explorers; this corresponds to more flattering portrayals of them:

These people are in nature veye subtil, and sharpe witted, readye to conceive our meaning by signes, and to make answere,.... They delight in musicke above measure, and will keep time and stroke to any tune which you shal sing, both wyth their voyce, heade, hande and feete, and wyll sing the same tune aptlye after you. They will rowe with our

oares in our boates, and kepe a true stroke with oure mariners, and seeme to take great delight therein. (Best 283)

Yet they maintain a pattern of irrational and incomprehensible behavior. For example, they show no understanding of the rules of war:

Their sullen and desperate nature doth herein manifestly appeare, that a companie of them being environed of our men, on the toppe of a high cliffe, so that they coulde by no meanes escape our handes... chose rather to cast themselves headlong downe the rockes into the sea, and so to be brused and drowned, rather than to yeeld themselves to our men's mercies. (Best 283)

The English Renaissance celebrated the influence of the classical world, including the great philosophical minds of Greek and Rome. It was from these arguments that civilization was defined. Ellis, for example, yearns to be “taught by the sage philosophers[,] the fathers of eloquence, whose sweete and sacred sappe I never sucked” (A.iii). His use of consonance makes a modern reader squirm, but the debt to the classical model is clear. The indigenous men and women that Best encounters are distinguished from his own conceptualization of humanity because they transgress the established institutions of family, community, and religion. The native did not settle with others, he did not labor, and he was not anchored by ties to social institutions, such as the church or government. *A true discourse* searches for a known place, an old familiar; what Best finds is new and threatening and uncomfortable. It is a binary of good or bad, like Europe, not like Europe. He projects the civitas he inherits from Aristotle onto an unstructured, unincorporated, and seemingly lawless and uncivilized New World. The connection between them is unmistakable. Best seeks to apply these ancient world values to the New World, which he treats not as new and unique but as an extension of England

itself. In what is now Newfoundland, there was no discernable form of government, no recognizable institutions. More than simply bringing structure and definition, *A true discourse* seeks to perpetuate the civilized English identity, by which men might be “withdrawn from barbarous feritie... to humanity and justice” (Stowe 200). Best presents the New World as both a marvelous attraction and a place that yielded an insufficiently satisfying return, not only for the explorers, who often sailed back empty-handed, but also for the Inuit, who bore the malice and abuse of the Europeans.

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